

Enhancing access to learning aids and resources at windhoek correctional facility

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Abstract

This research study aims to improve access to learning aids and resources for inmates in Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) within the confines of the Windhoek Correctional Facility, aiming to facilitate the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals, as well as suggest possible recommendations to achieve enhanced access to learning Aids and Resources at correctional facilities in Namibia. The study used a qualitative-method approach, including case study, interviews, and observations, to evaluate the facility's existing learning environments and assess the sufficiency and accessibility of resources. It also explores the impact of restricted access on inmates' educational and personal growth. The research seeks inspiration from successful models in other correctional facilities and identifies innovative approaches, such as technology integration, partnerships with educational institutions, and community involvement. The findings will inform policy recommendations and practical interventions.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO), (2021) asserts that around 11 million people are in penal institutions worldwide, a number that is constantly growing. With prisons frequently overcrowded, prison systems around the world are at crisis point, unable to provide services such as education to the level required by international standards as most of the

prison facilities are faced with multiple educational challenges. To fulfil the obligation of education as a fundamental human right, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares: "Everyone has the right to education." This implies that the right to education and training applies to all persons, including all persons in prison, (Vorhaus, 2014). In other words, prisoners should not be deprived. Therefore, the right to education, also implies a right to lifelong learning for prisoners. According to the first rule for the treatment of prisoners, within the minimum rules established by the Human Nations (Nelson Mandela Rules), "All prisoners must be treated with an inherent respect for the value and dignity of the human being" (Lanfredi, 2016:21).

Education plays therefore, a significant role in prisoners' reintegration into society. With reference to [Vocational Education and Training \(TVET\)](#) programmes in prisons, it provide inmates with skills to find a job and earn a living wage after serving their prison terms (Mbatha, Kere, Ferej & Kitainge, 2019).

Access to learning aids and resources for inmates in vocational educational and training programmes in correctional facilities remain critical aspect of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts within the criminal justice system. Providing educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals aims to reduce recidivism, improve life skills, and enhance the overall well-being of prisoners (MacKenzie, 2006; Khoabane, 2018). Many correctional facilities offer educational programmes, including basic literacy, high school diploma/ general educational development programmes, and Technical and Vocational Education and training. These programmes are designed to address the educational needs of inmates, as many enter the correctional system with low levels of educational attainment.

In fulfilling its obligation and in line with international standards of declaring education for all, Namibia like other countries of the world, through the Ministry of Safety and Security, Department of Prison Services, have recognized the pivotal role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training as means for imparting practical employment skills to inmates so that they become productive and self-supporting as of paramount importance. One of the correctional centres that offers TVET programmes is the Windhoek Correctional facility, which offers courses such as welding and metal fabrication, joinery and cabinet-making, fashion and fabrics, auto and diesel mechanics, panel beating and spray painting, bricklaying and plastering, agriculture, electrical general as well as filter and turner. The purpose of these vocational courses is to assist inmates in attaining the requisite vocational skills in the contemporary job market as well as linking them up with prospective employers. It is emphasized that prisoners who participate in TVET programmes have better employment patterns after their release and are less involved in disciplinary abuses during their sentences (Lawrence, Mears & Dubin (2002; Vacca, 2004).

Despite the positive impact of TVET programmes in correctional settings in Namibia, there have been challenges. Inmates often face challenges in accessing traditional learning aids such as textbooks and educational materials. Correctional facilities often operate with limited budgets. Allocating funds for educational programmes, including TVET, is challenging. Acquiring up-to-date learning aids, equipment, and resources is restricted due to financial constraints (Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Cataldi & Tauschek, 2004). TVET programmes require specific infrastructure such as workshops, labs, and specialized classrooms. Many correctional facilities lack the necessary physical space and infrastructure to support hands-on training, hindering the effective implementation of practical vocational education. Security is a paramount concern in correctional facilities. The introduction of tools, machinery, or materials for technical training raises security issues. Striking a balance between providing practical training and maintaining a secure environment is a significant challenge.

Furthermore, finding qualified instructors with expertise in technical and vocational fields is challenging. Recruiting skilled professionals willing to work in correctional facilities is difficult, leading to a shortage of instructors who can deliver high-quality TVET programmes. TVET programmes often benefit from partnerships with industries for practical training, internships, and job placement. Establishing such partnerships within correctional facilities is challenging due to perceptions, logistical issues, and hesitancy from potential industry partners.

Technical and vocational training often involves the use of specialized equipment and technology. Maintaining and updating these equipment within correctional facilities is problematic due to limited resources and a lack of technical expertise. In a correctional setting, inmates have diverse learning needs, educational backgrounds, and prior experiences. Tailoring TVET programmes to accommodate individual differences and learning styles requires a flexible and personalized approach. Some correctional facilities have restrictions on accessing certain types of information, including online resources. This limitation can impede the ability to provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive learning materials, particularly in rapidly evolving technical fields. Institutional resistance to change, bureaucratic hurdles, and a lack of awareness or support for the benefits of TVET programmes within correctional systems can impede the development and sustainability of such initiatives (Honorato, 2022).

The objectives of the study were to: (1) explore the challenges that hinders effective access to learning and resources of TVET programme at Windhoek Correctional Facility; and (2) suggest possible resolutions to address the challenges by faced by TVET programmes to enhance access and resources in Correctional Facilities in Namibia.

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and case study design to appropriately address the objectives of the study. One of the benefits of using qualitative research approach is that it produces the thick, detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences; and interprets the meanings of their actions (Denzin cited in, Rahman, 2017). Interview schedules were designed, conducted and used as data collection instruments. According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002) interview schedules can increase the reliability and credibility of data gathered. It allows interviewers and researchers to get more information, since they can ask follow-up queries or clarifications to the questions they have prepared. The subjective views and experiences of TVET instructors and trainees (inmates) in TVET programme were perceived as vital in determining the challenges experienced by TVET programme at Windhoek Correctional Facility. These were selected using the purposive samples. The total size sample consisted of 10 respondents. Data collected through interviews were transcribed, coded, analysed, interpreted. The process of transcribing the interviews helped researchers to gain more understanding of the subject from repeatedly listening to and reading the transcribed interviews. The codes applied are keywords which are used to categorise or organize text and are considered an essential part of qualitative research. The data was then analysed, categorised and organised into themes and further sub-themes which emerged through the coding process. The themes which emerged were assigned a specific code accordingly. The next stage involved interpreting the data by identifying any reoccurring themes throughout and highlighting any similarities and differences in the data. The final stage involved data verification, this process involves a process of checking validity of understanding by rechecking the transcripts and codes again, thus allowing the researcher to verify or modify hypotheses already arrived at previously. The study was conducted from April 2023 to June 2023 at Windhoek correctional facility in the Khomas region of Namibia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated earlier, this study explored the challenges that hinders effective access to learning and resources of TVET programme at Windhoek Correctional Facility.

The challenges that hinders effective access to learning and resources of TVET programme at Windhoek Correctional Facility.

One of the objectives of the study was to explore the challenges that hinders effective access to learning and resources at Windhoek correctional facilities. The study discovered that TVET trainees at Windhoek Correctional Facility are faced with insufficient instructional materials and resources. These challenges have been sources of discouragement for most trainees and have attributed to some trainees dropping out from TVET programme. The study discovered that the TVET programme is one of the underfunded programmes within the Namibian Prison Services. In welding for instance, respondents indicated insufficient training materials for both the trainers and the trainees, similar findings were also presented by Arnal, (2002). This is because acquiring up-to-date learning aids, equipment, and resources is restricted due to financial constraints experienced by the TVET programme.

Ratheeswari (2018) acknowledges that this digital era, ICT use in the classroom is important for giving students opportunities to learn and apply the required skills. ICT improves teaching and learning and its importance for teachers in performing their role of creators of pedagogical environments. In line with this, the study discovered that most TVET trainers at Windhoek correctional facilities, are unable to integrate modern technology in their teaching processes, this is because they lack access to the digital technologies necessary for improving the digital literacy and technological advancement of their trainees, similar findings were also presented by Pokornowski & Tanaka, (2022).

In terms of enlisting qualified instructors, the study discovered that enlisting qualified instructors with expertise in technical and vocational fields has been challenge at Windhoek correctional facilities due to shortage of instructors who can deliver high-quality TVET programmes. Furthermore, it was also found that TVET facilities at Windhoek Correctional facility, lacks the necessary infrastructure to support TVET programmes indicating inadequate workshops, and spaces for hands-on training, hindering the effective implementation of practical TVET programme. Similar findings were presented at the 5th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences by Aripin, Ramly, Adnan & Pairan, (2022). As one of the respondents expounded that:

"We don't have enough workshops and proper facilities for us and our trainees to do practical sessions, high authority of the correctional facility have informed us that there are no funds to procure, renovate and equip these workshops with necessary equipment"

Respondents also explained that it is often important for TVET programmes to be aligned with the current job market for successful reintegration. As correctly affirmed by Winch (2013) that failure of employers to demand TVET from their employees or prospective employees will, in turn, affect the demand for TVET from prospective employees. However, at Windhoek Correctional Facility the study discovered that it is difficult to stay updated on industry trends and adjusting curricula. Respondents also narrated that shifting priorities within correctional systems or changes in policies is affecting the continuity and sustainability of TVET programmes. Political, administrative, or budgetary changes is impacting the commitment to provide TVET. In relations to this finding, Wahba (2012); UNESCO-UNEVOC, (2017) affirmed that in most developing Countries, funding towards TVET is ad hoc and arbitral, TVET institutions have been neglected or overtaken by institutions concentrating on purely academic education without any practical training.

The study also found that Windhoek Correctional Facility is comprised of inmates with varying levels of education and literacy. Therefore, tailoring educational materials to meet the diverse learning needs and literacy levels of all the inmates' population is challenging.

Possible resolutions to address the challenges by faced by TVET programmes to enhance access and resources in Correctional Facilities in Namibia.

Improving access to learning aids and resources for inmates in correctional facilities requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration among correctional authorities, educational institutions, advocacy groups, and policymakers. When asked what possible resolutions can address the challenges experienced by TVET programmes that can enhance access and resources in correctional facilities in Namibia, respondents recommended that to address the challenges faced by correctional facilities, it is crucial for the Department of Prison Services to consider increasing funding for Correctional Education, specifically the TVET programme to enable this section to acquire resources for learning aids, textbooks, technology, and vocational training equipment. As underlined by UNESCO-UNEVOC, (2017) that to contribute to the achievement of the global sustainable development agenda, the financing of TVET systems including in prison facilities remain a key importance.

It was also recommended that if the Namibian Prison Services is sincere in equipping inmates with vocational skills, there is a need for it to invest in the development and improvement of educational infrastructure within correctional facilities. This includes establishing well-equipped classrooms, workshops, and computer labs to support a variety of educational programmes. As observed by the U.S. Department of Education (2022) that expanding use of educational technology is an important start, but it also requires ongoing attention to state policy, technical considerations, and staffing to ensure that technology is safely used to improve the quality of instruction and learning. Respondents also recommended that the TVET section of the Windhoek Correctional Services should develop individualized learning plans for inmates based on their educational background, skills, and interests. Tailoring educational programmes to the specific needs of each inmate can improve engagement and outcomes.

Also the TVET section to explore the possibility to provide inmates with increased access to technology, such as computers and tablets, for educational purposes. This allows for online learning, access to digital resources, and engagement with interactive educational tools. Further, it was also recommended that it is crucial for the TVET section of the Prison Service to foster partnerships with local colleges, universities, and vocational training institutions to bring TVET expertise, researchers, instructors, and resources into correctional facilities. Collaborative efforts can enhance the quality and diversity of TVET programmes. It is also important for the TVET section at Prison Services to establish partnerships with industries to facilitate vocational training programmes. This collaboration can provide inmates with practical, real-world skills and enhance their employability upon release. Respondents also proposed for the implementation of human resources development programmes for TVET instructors in correctional facilities. Similar affirmation was also presented by UNESCO (2021) that improving intake of teachers and instructors who have industrial training as well as providing ongoing professional development with industrial attachment as a focus is critical in enhancing learning. Also enhance the competencies of teachers and instructors towards student, problem solving and practical oriented of teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

A research study focused on enhancing access to learning aids and resources in correctional facilities within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) context can make a significant contribution to both the fields of education and criminal justice. The research study can make a valuable contribution to understanding how TVET programmes and improved access to learning aids can play a role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals within correctional facilities, ultimately contributing to broader societal benefits.

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