

Prison Education

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Introduction and Background

Prison education in the United States has a long history dating back to the early 20th century. However, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that prison education programs gained widespread recognition and support. During this time, there was a growing recognition that education could help reduce recidivism rates and prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reentry into society. The American prisons have over time developed as a place to punish convicted criminals and this is illustrated by how different educational aims were manifested in a prison setting. “Some saw the goal of punishment as transformative and tended to focus on the moral instruction of offenders to teach them how to live non-criminal lives (see Goldsmith, 1997)”.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the U.S. prison population was 1,204,300 at year end 2021, a 1% decrease from 2020 (1,221,200) and a 25% decrease from 2011 (1,599,000). About 700,000 incarcerated individuals leave federal and state prisons yearly to return to their local communities where they will have to compete with individuals in those communities for jobs. In today’s economy, a college education is a necessity to compete for jobs. Incarcerated people are mostly at a disadvantage without college education or any higher education plans. “According to Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (Carnevel, Smith, and Strohl, 2013), two-thirds of job postings will require some level of college education by 2020”. The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists 174 occupations as having a typical entry- level education, requirement of a bachelor’s degree, and it projects that employment in these occupations will grow by 10 percent over the next decade (Torpey, 2018).

Prison-based education has been the product of both the private and public sector. The Quakers, a private sector religious group that was influential in the development of the Pennsylvania Prison Model, sought to create an environment that would foster self-reflection in those who were imprisoned by providing offenders with Bibles to facilitate their “moral” education, (Pollock, 1997). As the public sector, Federal and state fundings support and expand prison education in the hopes to reduce its rapidly growing prison population.

In the years since, there has been emphasis on different types of prison-based education, depending upon the dominant correctional goal of a given period. Prison education programs have expanded and evolved to include a wide range of academic and vocational, training opportunities. These programs have been shown to have a positive impact on both, individuals and society, as they can help reduce the likelihood of future criminal behavior and increase employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Fishkill Correctional Facility, located in New York State, is one example of a prison that has implemented a robust education program for its inmates. The facility offers a range of educational programs, including adult basic education, high school equivalency classes, college courses, and vocational training. These programs are designed to help inmates acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the job market upon release.

The educational programs at Fishkill Correctional Facility have been successful in improving the outcomes for inmates. According to a report by the Vera Institute of Justice, inmates who participate in educational programs are 43% less likely to return to prison within three years of release. Additionally, the report found that every dollar invested in prison education programs saves taxpayers between \$4 and \$5 in reduced recidivism cost.

In conclusion, prison education in the United States has a long history and has been shown to have a positive impact on both individuals and society. Fishkill Correctional Facility is an example of a prison that has successfully implemented a robust education program for its inmates, which has been shown to reduce recidivism rates and save taxpayers money in the long run.

Literature View

Our research topic resonates with the Fishkill prison located upstate New York and targets aspects of education programs, success rates of inmates, social services provided, and more. The “FIRST STEP ACT” intends to progress reforming the criminal justice system by providing mandatory minimum sentencing reforms, expanding drug rehabilitation programs, and keeping the incarcerated closer to home. Correctional facilities providing higher education opportunities to those who are incarcerated results in a positive outcome upon the students participating as well among the population inside the prison. According to Rockinist.org “College-in-prison” programs are run by accredited universities and colleges and also offer the chance for participants to earn their college degrees in order to succeed in the real world outside of the criminal justice system. Education has been proven to be the most effective program when it comes to reducing recidivism and the higher level of education that is attained by the individual, they will more likely succeed in gaining stable employment while being less likely to participate in further illegal activities.

According to Nyassembly.gov these programs provided that target rehabilitation can decrease the rate of recidivism which can increase public safety. The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision maintains a budget of approximately \$2.7 billion. They spend around 9% of their budget on programs for inmates and claim to have an “Extensive array of

programs and services for inmates to redirect their lives and become productive, law-abiding members of society. Programs include educational and vocational training, substance abuse treatment, parenting skills, anger management, domestic violence counseling, health education, sex offender treatment, religious services, and many more." as stated on their website.

A few rising concerns we have questioned include topics such as “Are prisoners less likely to recidivate if they receive post secondary education? What determines eligibility for prisoners looking to participate in education programs? What social services are being provided in upstate prisons such as Fishkill? And do they offer the same financial aid options?” According to www.prisonpolicy.org those who are incarcerated and participating in prison education programs are actually 43 percent less likely to recidivate. This also provides them with the preparation, motivation, and opportunity to progress in their lives after their release. Studies show that even basic level education such as literacy and other basic skills can reduce the rate of recidivism giving inmates the chance to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities. The chances of recidivism reoccurring decreases as those who are incarcerated achieve higher levels of education.

According to <https://studentaid.gov> those who are incarcerated are not eligible to receive student federal loans. If they are in a federal or state facility they can not receive a federal pell grant, however they may be eligible to to receive a Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant or a Federal Work study but it is unlikely. Priority of these grants must be provided to the students who will also be receiving federal Pell grants which they are not qualified for and also the difficulties of performing a Federal Work study while being incarcerated. Funding for education programs in prison come from the state budget in which American taxpayers pay approximately \$80 billion yearly to fund. These programs even reward

prisoners by offering them an earlier release resonating with the degree they are pursuing. For example if they earn their GED they may be eligible for a six month early release. If they earn their associates they can get a year off, and two years if they earn their bachelors.

According to <https://www.corrections.sa.gov>. Social workers play a great role in working with offenders on an individual or group basis. Social workers are employed in prisons and in Community Correctional Centres working on complex cases that provide professional development opportunities and skills. This can be done through assessments and intervention services provided for inmates. Social workers can also conduct individual counseling, treatment assessments, and facilitate group programs. The purpose of this is to enhance and support rehabilitation to further improve the lives of those who are incarcerated. They address factors that are affiliated with offending behaviors as well as assisting them with their process. Responsibilities of a social worker include identifying the offender's social development needs, monitoring the responses of the offenders to conditions of the court, and preparing comprehensive reports to facilitate the inmates release plans. Correction or criminal Justice related social work includes providing mental health and substance abuse counseling as well as finding other alternatives to incarceration. They can provide a variety of services in corrections and usually support demographic groups that need more attending to. Social workers usually work on interdisciplinary teams in order to establish rehabilitation programs and treatment in order to discharge plans for those incarcerated.

Purpose Of Study

The current research points out that even though educational programs greatly benefit prisoners by raising their self-esteem and decreasing recidivism. When prisoners leave prison, it does not certain they will have a job. We found it difficult that while there are educational programs for prisoners, they cannot afford to pay for them. We found out that the Higher Education Act (HEA Act) prohibits the act for prisoners. This is difficult because most prisoners do not have jobs or financial means. Therefore, how are they supposed to pay for their education. I believe that educational programs in prison can be very helpful for the inmates, but I've noticed that the articles don't indicate whether the educational programs include training for job interviews and resumes for prisoners. I do wonder if inmates receiving jobs after their reentry into society will improve if they take part in job training like "dress for success," "job interview practice," and "field experience" seminars.

The purpose of this study is to determine the advantages and results of prison education. Even though Fishkill Correctional Facility is the main concern, questions like How Do Educational Programs Benefit by Improving Inmates' Lives, Do Educational Programs in Prison Offer Financial Aid Options, and What Qualifies a Prisoner for Any Program Offered by Alliance University at Fishkill Correctional Facility still need to be answered. These research questions speak to the main issue at hand. We will be able to answer the research questions and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of prison education by performing this research, which will enable us to collect data that supports the research questions. The number of prisoners who profit from a prison education and those who do not will be determined by quasi-experimental research, which will be conducted. With the help of quasi-experimental research, we will be able to identify the strengths and limitations of prison education, as well as how these implementations affect the study's findings.

References

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