

Postsecondary Education Motivates Prisoners

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Introduction & Background

Despite the national incarceration rate being at its lowest in 20 years, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022). The United States has one federal, 50 states, and 18,000 local prison systems as America holds two million people inside 1,566 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,850 local jails, 1,510 juvenile correctional facilities, 186 immigrant detention facilities, 82 Indian country jails, as well as military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the United States territories (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022). Due to such statistics, 60% of inmates are entirely illiterate (Zoukis, 2017). Lack of education is linked to crime, as academic failure increases delinquency, violence, and wrongdoings. There is a deep need for post-secondary education for inmates, as they are significantly less educated than the general population. This research will focus on the effects of providing postsecondary education to incarcerated students.

As President Barack Obama once said, *“The United States is home to 5 percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of the world’s prisoners. Our incarceration rate is four times higher than China’s. We keep more people behind bars than the top 35 European countries combined”* (Remarks by the President at the NAACP Conference, 2015). The Federal Bureau of Prisons reported the number of inmates according to race, Asians 2,267, Black 60,656, Native Americans 4,125, and White 90,606 inmates according to the last update in February of 2023 (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2023). The highest percentage of imprisoned offenders are White with 57.5% followed by Black with 38.5%. Furthermore, the least percentage of inmates are

Native Americans of 2.6%, and Asians at 1.4% (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2023). Such individuals are serving sentences for the crime which was committed. The target population for this study has been sentenced to one or more offenses, like crimes against a person, property, inchoate, statutory, financial, and other crimes. Incarcerated individuals, regardless of their criminal offense, deserve the opportunity to have a second chance. Post-secondary education provided to vulnerable populations leads to inmate motivation while in prison. Such results of inmate students lead to safe communities due to the improvement of recidivism, inmate wellness, self-esteem, religion, and educational influence in rehabilitation. Education intervention is a second chance for inmates to break chains from their past to better themselves and improve their loved ones' lives (Prison Scholar Fund, 2019).

Despite inmate students' willingness and motivation to proceed with post-secondary education little analysis and research have been carried out on its effectiveness. Education provides prisoners with the opportunity to obtain a degree and gives them a renewed sense of purpose. Not much is known about the impact of education on such a vulnerable population as it is about mass incarceration. Research has also primarily focused on the recidivism rate of inmates after their release, without determining solutions such as education to determine reductions in future offending behavior. The importance of educational intervention has proven it affects the lives of prisoners after their release. The impact and power of education provided to prisoners is undeniable, as inmates are provided with a chance.

Literature Review

Postsecondary Education Motivating Inmates

To determine if postsecondary education motivates inmates, it is important to learn why post-secondary education was introduced to correctional facilities, including how it influences recidivism reduction for inmates. The purpose of prisons is to rehabilitate inmates, penalize inmates for the crimes they commit, and keep the general public safe from crime and criminals (Duwe & Clark, 2014). Once an inmate serves his/her sentence and is released into the general public, there are many social problems they tend to face. The social problems consist of isolation, financial security via poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, substance and/or alcohol abuse, self-harm, and/or suicide. Recidivism is one of the highest risks that post-release inmates experience. According to Duwe and Clark (2014), more than one-third of prisoners from Minnesota state prisons will re-enter prison 3 years after post-release for a new felony charge. Due to most prison populations consisting of young inmates and inmates who lack education, upon post-release, many felons reintegrate back into society with a lack of education and basic job skills (Duwe & Clark, 2014). Due to post-released offenders not having the best education and low and/or basic job skills, they're not able to obtain and maintain a job to help support themselves, their families, and their needs. Not having financial security and educational credentials to thrive in the general public, this issue may tempt post-release offenders to incriminate themselves by committing new crimes and/or the same crimes.

Some prisoners view education as a way of achieving a specific goal or they participate in educational programs because they want to learn and acquire scholastic knowledge (Manger et al., 2020). Based on this information, inmates can have intrinsic and external motivations when

it comes to pursuing higher education. Furthermore, there are other motivations that inspire prisoners to pursue their education, such as being able to obtain a job easily and avoid working a prison job (Manger et al., 2020). Lastly, self-reflection on one's future and how to cope with life post-release motivated prisoners to pursue education (Manger et al., 2020).

Some researchers shared, their studies of inmate motivation for attending prison education programs are not solely based on the prospect of an early release (Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). Edwards and Chivers (2005), however release conditions and early release can be a motivating factor for inmates. Furthermore, mention how inmate students' perception of instructor knowledge can be accredited to their motivation too (Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). Witnessing other inmates' success in participating in postsecondary education programs can be another motivating factor for some inmates, giving inmates a fresh start in life, and an outlet to stay out of trouble and prison drama (Gendron & Cavan, 2007).

Postsecondary education can provide prisoners with employment opportunities that can help prisoners stay afloat post-release. Researchers Duwe and Clark conducted a study among offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2007 and 2008, offenders who obtained a post-secondary degree in prison had lower rates of recidivism than their comparison group counterparts (Duwe & Clark, 2014). The employment rate for offenders who earned their post-secondary degrees (71%) was slightly higher than that of the prisoners in the comparison group which was prisoners with secondary education (68%) (Duwe & Clark, 2014).

In conclusion, offenders earning a secondary education or post-secondary education degree in prison significantly improve their chances of securing post-release employment but, it does not guarantee better pay or consistent employment. Offenders who earned post-secondary degrees

were more successful at maintaining employment following their release from prison due to secondary education consists of basic skill development, whereas a post-secondary degree involves providing students with the knowledge required to succeed within a particular field or discipline (Duwe & Clark, 2014). The type of degree an offender earns determines the number of job opportunities one has access to. According to studies, offenders are less likely to commit crimes when they are occupied with work, work more hours, and earned more total wages, which can reduce their economic needs (Duwe & Clark, 2014).

Inmates' Rehabilitation Motives

Inmates with higher education attainment obtained during serving sentences serve as rehabilitation to former offenders. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 95% of people in state prisons are discharged (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Before being released offenders are challenged with rebuilding their lives, such as family reunification, community reintegration, securing housing, employment, medical care, and addictive services (Johnson, 2020). Preparing for reentry to society, prison inmates are motivated to be released with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources. Research has demonstrated that educational programs, including Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED education, life skills, vocational training, and postsecondary education help to create better environments within correctional institutions and reduce recidivism after release (Erisman & Contrado, 2005). Research has proven that prison education obtained by inmates results in reducing violence inside correctional facilities before their release. It has been reported by Evaluating the Effectiveness of Corrections Education, people in prisons who participated in structured education while incarcerated were at least 14% less likely to recidivate than those who did not (Davis et al., 2013). Due to the fact that it increases the

likelihood of employment upon their release. Inmates motivated to make a change upon their discharge from prison, take advantage of the educational programs provided. The Institute for Higher Education Policy, Postsecondary Correctional Education (PSCE) reported that it has emerged as a cost-saving form of rehabilitation, reentry preparation, and recidivism reduction (Johnson, 2020).

Inmates enter prison with the harsh reality of their family relationships being under distress and rapid deterioration. The study found that inmates who participated in a family life education program learned how to repair and maintain family relationships, lowering recidivism rates and reducing disciplinary problems within the prison system (Bayse, D. J., Allgood, S. M., & Van Wyk, P. H., 1991). The project concluded with both groups having an equal size (n=27). The study proceeded with the purpose of helping inmates repair and strengthen their family relationships while serving their sentences. All were incarcerated for different crimes, such as burglary, sex-related, and violent crimes against people such as murder, manslaughter, assault, and drug-related. Inmates participated in classes that addressed issues of narcissism, appropriate self-disclosure, and decision-making. Inmates initiated lessons by drawing genograms and identified chains that linked them to their past, which lead to conclude with inmates discarding chains as a symbol of commitment to change (Bayse, D. J., Allgood, S. M., & Van Wyk, P. H., 1991). Offenders learned negotiation skills, child discipline, individual responsibility, communication skills, trust, self-control, self-esteem, and altruistic love. The study demonstrated that 18 of 27 participants passed the program, in which there were no significant differences between the control group and experimental group scores in the final exam. The study concluded that the teaching method is an effective way to reduce narcissistic characteristics among inmates,

as it should improve family functioning when the prisoners are released. Inmates need rehabilitation.

Christianity Motivate Inmates

It is believed that without the intervention of comprehensive rehabilitation, the majority of overwhelming inmates will be returning to prison shortly. A study was conducted to measure whether Christian programs had a positive influence on 124 male inmates participating in an Adult Basic Education Program at a closed security prison in the southeastern United States (Messemer, J.E., 2007). The religious aspect dates back to the Colonial period, in which literacy was a means of ensuring that individuals understand their sinful nature, repent of their sins to God, and gain salvation (Messemer, J. E., 2007). Academic and religious programs operate under the United States Prison Systems seeking to create change in the future behaviors of inmates upon being released. As Martin Luther King Jr once said, “we need religion and education to change attitudes and to change the hearts of men” (Messemer, J. E., 2007). The study consisted of two main groups, the experimental which consisted of inmates who self-reported attending Christian programs, and the control group which solely reported no Christian belief. It is to be noted that inmates participating in the study had an average grade completion rate of a ninth-grade level before being incarcerated (Messemer, J. E., 2007). Results indicated that Christian programs have a positive influence on inmates' learning gains, as they have fewer disciplinary problems, less absenteeism in the classroom, and better academic achievement. As for the experimental group, the learning experience became a spiritual transformation. In which they felt accountability for their actions and the desire to make a change. Education and Christianity prove the benefits for inmates, such as an increase in self-confidence,

self-improvement, and improving educational knowledge and skills (Messemer, J. E., 2007). The influence of religion does help inmates' academic achievement due to their discipline to change.

Prison inmates undergoing post-secondary education are more likely to be sparse, as few Christians were assisting such academic space in the study (Johnson, 2020). The research was conducted on how Christian institutions of higher learning could address the issue of mass incarceration (Johnson, 2020). Research conducted by Kimberlee Johnson, Director of the Prison Education Program demonstrated that prison education motives lead to inmates being personally transformative. In such corrections spaces, Christian inmates are offered ubiquitous worship and bible studies. As well, Christian Institutions advocate for incarcerated students in postsecondary programs to be eligible to receive federal financial aid (Johnson, 2020). Such opportunities provide transformational education for those incarcerated and assist in the rehabilitation process of credentials (Johnson, 2020). Inmates are directly impacted by mass incarceration, while in condiment inmates earn paralegal certification, Associate degrees, and Bachelor's degrees from Christian Universities. Testimony of inmate transformation, “Nyack College has one of the largest and most successful colleges in prison programs, having provided services in the Fishkill Correctional Facility with a 0% recidivism rate among its graduates (as of January 2020). Its ability to connect through other networks—Hudson Link, and faith communities—has contributed to its success. Nyack alumnus, Sean Pica, who earned his degree at Sing Sing prison, is now Executive Director of Hudson Link and a founding board member of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison.” (Johnson, 2020)

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine does postsecondary education increase inmates' motivation level. There can be many factors that lead to high recidivism prison rates such as offenders having a difficult time adjusting back to life in the public, discrimination due to criminal history, and lack of basic education and skills to thrive in the community (Duncombe et al., 2005). Postsecondary Education programs can be protective factors for offenders and can reduce recidivism rates among offenders. Postsecondary education programs can help inmates gain employment opportunities, reduce re-entry, and make the rehabilitative process easier. These programs give prisoners a sense of autonomy and are influential methods for offenders to rehabilitate, and offenders can transition into society smoothly compared to inmates who do not participate in these programs. More studies can implement research to discover do inmates utilize their postsecondary education credentials post-release and do inmates' motivation levels remain high post-release to curb recidivism.

Research Methods

Research Design

We are proposing the research design would be a mixed method research design. A mixed method is best for this research because the study will collect both qualitative and quantitative data that can help improve research findings. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, it enhances the quality and precision of the findings. In other words, qualitative and quantitative counterbalance each other's weaknesses, to prevent fewer flaws in our research. This research design can enhance the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. For the

qualitative aspect of the research, we will record or compute our data. Then the data collected in the first step is recorded and computed to be ready for analysis. We will import data into Nvivo for analysis. Next, upon reviewing data, we will identify themes and essential patterns. Nvivo will be the tool we use to help us identify themes. The data will be coded through Nvivo because this coding system will involve attaching codes to specific sections of the data that relate to the identified themes. The Nvivo system will be used to discover the relationships between different themes and how they have interconnected with one another. Next, Nvivo can create and display numerous visualizations to help understand the data and relationships between different themes. Lastly, when the data has been examined, the findings are transcribed in the subject of the research questions and goals of this study.

Measurement and Instrumentation

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Conceptualization</u></p> <p>Motivation(Dependent Variable) <i>“Motivation is the desire to act in service of achieving a goal. Can be considered a driving force behind human behavior. Motivation encompasses the desire to continue striving toward meaning, purpose, and a life worth living”</i> (Psychology Today, n.d.).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Operationalization</u></p> <p>Participants rate the importance of major life goals that reflect seven broad domains. Major Life Goals Questionnaire, A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not important to me) to 5 (very important to me) is employed.</p> <p>Participants rate the significance of motivation for change in one’s life situation. Motivation for Change Questionnaire, This 48-item measure utilizes 4- and 5-point scales ranging from 1 (always) to 5 (never) and from 1 (total agreement) to 4 (no agreement at all).</p>
<p>Post-secondary Education (Independent Variable)</p>	<p>Participants in Alliance University Postsecondary program that is in Fishkill correctional facility.</p>

Sampling Plan

We are proposing the most appropriate sampling plan for this study, convenience sampling. The convenience sampling plan is non-random and allows us to gain information from the participants that attends Alliance University because they're easy for us to access. This sampling plan is cost-effective and will help us meet our deadline within the short timeframe we have. The random sampling method is relevant to our research as it would represent the general population of all inmates participating in post-secondary education. The inmate's ages would be 18-50-year-old inmates that are imprisoned at Fishkill correctional facility whose enrolled in Alliance University postsecondary education program.

Data Collection Method

The data collection that will be used while conducting this research surveys in the form of questionnaires and scales. In addition, face-to-face interviews will be conducted to collect data as well. The benefits of using surveys in the form of questionnaires are that it is cost-effective, respondent anonymity can be given to participants quickly, and data accuracy. The data collected can be put automatically into a database, reducing the risk of human mishandling. The purpose of using a scale as a form of a survey is to put thoughts in feelings into measurable forms. The scales will help researchers gain insight into prisoners' thoughts and feeling when it comes to motivation, and how post-secondary education influences their motivation or not. Using a scale is readable and will also be very easy for inmates to understand. Lastly, researchers will conduct a face-to-face interview because it allows researchers to go more in-depth. Researchers will be able to gather detailed information from inmates, obtain high response rates from inmates, have the opportunity to clarify confusing questions or items, be able to observe, able to probe, and have fewer "I don't know" questions. It would take participants 15 minutes to complete the

scales, and the face-to-face interview would be 15 minutes. Participants will complete the surveys and face-to-face interviews before they begin the postsecondary education program, and once they complete the postsecondary education program, they will redo the surveys again and participate in a 2nd face-to-face interview. Measurements we will use are, Major Life Goals Questionnaire, A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not important to me) to 5 (very important to me) is employed, and the Motivation for Change Questionnaire, This 48-item measure utilizes 4- and 5-point scales ranging from 1 (always) to 5 (never) and from 1 (total agreement) to 4 (no agreement at all).

Data Analysis Plan

1. Descriptive Statistics: We will study a sample of $n= 100$ inmates who participate in the Alliance University postsecondary education program at Fishkill Correctional Facility. The race of the inmates is 50 Black males, 25 Latino males, and 25 Causacaion males/ The ages range from 18 years old- 50 years old. The inmate's highest education level is a high school diploma and G.E.D., with 45 % of the sample having a high school diploma. and 55 % with their G.E.D.
2. The appropriate statistical test for this research would be a dependent measures t-test also known as a paired t-test. The reason researchers prefer to use this statistical test is because, we would like to measure the inmate's motivation level before participating in a post-secondary education program, and then test their motivation level after they completed the postsecondary education program to test whether our hypothesis regarding post-secondary education has an influence on inmates motivation level. We will keep the

sample as ONE group throughout the entire process because we are not conducting an experimental group with two different group participants.

Conclusion (Contribution to Social Work)

The purpose of this research is to highlight how post-secondary education can have a positive influence on inmates' motivation. Due to inmates being a vulnerable population, having access to post-secondary education allows offenders upon re-entry into the general population to gain access to job opportunities. Furthermore, when inmates' motivation increases it has a positive impact on their mental health and self-esteem. The information provided, helps the social work practice create better interventions and policies that will guide prisoners out of an oppressive criminal justice system. As social workers, professionals will have the ability to achieve social justice, equality and ensure inmates will not return to prison cells. Regardless of the inmate's criminal history, social workers will be able to advocate for more educational post-secondary programs to benefit offenders. Increasing the chances for legislation to allow inmates the possibility to participate in post-secondary education while incarcerated. In addition, legislation can also re-think sentencing non-violent offenders to correctional facilities rather than place them in rehabilitation programs that offer education and employment training to help reduce recidivism. Furthermore, the findings could be generalized beyond the Fishkill Correctional Facility to other state, federal, and local prisons. As postsecondary education can provide prisoners with opportunities that can help offenders stay afloat post-release. The research would suggest social workers consider advocating for rehabilitation programs that would be more beneficial in reducing recidivism rates. Policymakers should support this movement.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

Post Secondary Education in Fishkill Correctional Facility Provided by Alliance University.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

LaQuandra Z. Gooden & Vanessa Carranza

Social Work Research Methods @ Alliance University

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PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you decide if you will participate in this study, please read the following information completely and carefully. It is important that you understand why the research is being done. If you have any questions or there is anything that you do not understand, please be sure to ask the researcher.

Alliance University is a private Christian University affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The purpose of this study is to examine does postsecondary education increase inmates' motivation level.

STUDY PROCEDURES (What we will do)

- 100 inmates between the ages of 18-50 years of age that are imprisoned at Fishkill Correctional Facility enrolled in Alliance University Post Secondary Education Program will be non-random selected to complete questionnaires.
- Surveys in the form of questionnaires and scales will be used during the study. The purpose of using a scale as a form of a survey is to put thoughts in feelings into measurable forms. The scales will help researchers gain insight about prisoners' thoughts

and feelings when it comes to motivation, and how post secondary education influences their motivation or not.

- Face-to-face interviews will be conducted to gather detailed information about 15 minutes to complete.
- Participants will complete the surveys and face-to face interview before they begin the postsecondary education program, and once they complete the postsecondary education program, they will redo the surveys again and participate in a 2nd face-to-face interview.
- A paired t-test will measure the motivation level before participating in a post secondary education program, and then test their motivation level after they completed the postsecondary education program to test whether our hypothesis regarding post secondary education has an influence on inmates motivation level.

RISKS

There are not risks involved in this research study. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

BENEFITS

Your participation will help advocate for post secondary programs that are beneficial to the inmate population. Post Secondary Education at the Fishkill Correctional Facility will facilitate inmates with motivations before being released.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All responses received will be completely anonymous. Please note that your personal information is not requested anywhere on this form.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

CONSENT

I read ___ and I understand ___ the information provided. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without any repercussions. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____