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## Examining Correctional Education Programs: The Lorton Prison College Program

William Sylvester Hacker  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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William S. Hacker

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Examining Correctional Education Programs: The Lorton Prison College Program

by

William S. Hacker

MEd, Howard University, 2002

BA, Howard University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2021

## Abstract

Over the years, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the purpose or goal of correctional institutions. Due to public outcry for harsher sentences due to the appearance of a light sentences imposed on those convicted of crimes, the goal of punishment has often won. Many offenders enter correctional institutions with low academic skills and low employability. Correctional education programs can be viewed as a form of rehabilitation that can assist with the reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals. Correctional education can help reduce recidivism and increase the employability of ex-offenders as they reintegrate. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine correctional education programs through the lived experiences of five formerly incarcerated African American men who participated in a correctional education program. NVivo software was used to aid in the analysis of the data gathered during the interviews. Using thematic coding, I was able to categories commonalities. Education, motivation, supportive relationships, and employment were the four themes emerged as reasons supporting successful community reintegration of ex-offenders. Polarities of democracy was the theoretical framework used in this study because its design was intended as a coalescing standard to strategize, steer, and assess democratic social change endeavors aimed to develop healthy, viable, and just communities. The findings of this study have the potential to powerfully contribute to positive social change. The study results will get interested parties involved in more meaningful correctional strategies and reintegration efforts to meet the needs of formerly incarcerated African American men. Thus, better treatment effects can assist in reducing recidivism.

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## Dedication

To my awesome mother, Lucille Hacker, who stood by me, supported me, and encouraged me during this journey and all my academic and professional journeys throughout the years, I say thank you. To my grandparents Henry and Ernestine Thomas, although no longer here with us, for always supporting me and being proud of my accomplishments. To my aunt and godmother Eleanora Thomas and Aunt Jeannette Garner, who were a source of strength and inspiration while they were here, gone but never forgotten.

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I would also like to acknowledge and thank all of those who participated in the research study for whom this goal would not have been achieved and Yukia Wilson a strong advocate for Returning Citizens. I must mention and acknowledge the support and guidance provided by Drs. Gloria Betts, Marilyn Hamilton, Abe Vasquez, Richard Mbakop, and Serita Kelsey who listened to my complaints, concerns, and frustrations, and kept me calm, steadfast, and focused with inspirational and comforting words. I must acknowledge Dr. Brandon Schweitzer for his assistance with the form and style formatting in preparation for final approval. I would also like to acknowledge Deborah Gibbs, Beverly Bennett-Roberts, Kathy Mosley, Caroline Oyuyo, Melinda Jennings, Andrea Linthicum, Alfreda Ellis, and Professors Pamela Perkins and Scott King.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Offender reentry was the phenomenon of interest in this study. The focus of this study was correctional educational programs, specifically the Lorton Prison College Program. The Lorton Prison College Program was a correctional educational program whereby a collaboration existed between Lorton Prison and Federal City College which is now known as the University of the District of Columbia. It was Owens's (2009) contention that 95% of convicted felons will return to society. Owens further claimed that a postsecondary education is a specific intervention that can be used to assist individuals returning to the community after years of incarceration. Thus, correctional educational programs were found worthy to explore.

It has been suggested that correctional educational programs can reduce recidivism rates among those individuals released from correctional institutions. It has also been suggested that former inmates enrolled in college classes after their release can also reduce recidivism. Potts and Palmer (2014) reported that parolees shared they will less likely return to prison because they are using their time wisely by attending college classes. By attending college classes, these parolees will spend more time engaged in academic studies and less time hanging out on the streets, which often leads to inappropriate or criminal behaviors.

Former inmates often carry the stigma of being convicted people when returning to the community from a period of incarceration. With the stigma of incarceration also comes the inability to obtain gainful employment. Therefore, a convicted individual returning to the community can improve their employment opportunities with education,

skills, or training. Nally et al. (2014) conducted a study that showed a former inmate's education and employment upon release were meaningfully and statistically connected to recidivism irrespective of the classification of the offender.

### **Background**

Although the criminal justice system in the United States is not complex, to many, it is a difficult system to comprehend. From their perspective, the punishment does not always fit the crimes committed. More importantly, individuals within the criminal justice system do not always appear to be treated fairly or equally. The criminal justice system has a history of prison and jail overcrowdings, a back log of court cases, and more cases are settled with plea bargains rather than a court decision. With a punitive focused system, offenders being released from incarceration are not provided the services and support needed to be productive members of society. Consequently, many ex-offenders engage in criminal activities post-release which often lead them back to a period of incarceration.

Probation and parole have been used to address prison overcrowding. Abadinsky (2018) claimed that probation began as a mechanism to keep minor offenders out of jail or prison. Probation is often described as an alternative to incarceration. In addition to being an alternative to incarceration, probation has become a way to control prison population due to mass incarceration and overcrowding. According to Abadinsky, the initial purpose of parole was to reduce and control the population of prisons and is still used for that purpose today.

Therefore, it should be noted that most incarcerated individuals will be released from correctional facilities. In part, this is because many inmates have been convicted of

property offenses, non-violent offenses, and drug offenses. Once released, they are expected to live healthy, and productive lives and contribute positively to society. Consequently, supportive intervention services as well as other resources, such as educational opportunities, should be put in place to reduce the existing high rate of recidivism. Unemployment and an ex-offender's unemployability can contribute to the high rates of recidivism in the United States.

Nally et al. (2014) conducted a study that found it was necessary for ex-offenders to overcome various obstacles to reenter their communities successfully after their period of incarceration. Nally et al. claimed that ex-offenders with minimal education were more likely to engage in behaviors that caused them to recidivate at a higher rate and experienced a higher rate of unemployment. Nally et al. acknowledged the fact that ex-offenders with lower levels of education were more likely to return to a period of reincarceration than their counterparts with higher levels of education.

During the period of 2005-2009, Nally et al. (2014) performed a 5-year study which followed-up on 6,561 ex-offenders released from the Indiana Department of Correction focusing on those offenders released during the 2005 calendar year. It was revealed that these 6,561 individuals were in a cohort who comprised over 43 % of all 15,184 ex-offenders released from the custody of Indiana Department of Corrections in 2005. Copenhaver et al. (2007) explored the experiences of former inmates to determine how those offenders who began their education as a form of rehabilitation during their period of confinement continued these same educational efforts on a college/university campus upon their release from confinement. Copenhaver et al. explored the manner in

which these released individuals addressed any social stigmas they may have experienced.

When previously incarcerated individuals return to society, they encounter many obstacles which include obtaining and maintaining a job as well as access to postsecondary education which may assist in offsetting such obstacles. Runell (2015) conveyed that post-secondary education is another way formerly incarcerated individuals can be deterred from committing future crimes. According to Livingston and Miller (2014), to reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals and afford them options to re-offending, post-secondary education may offer ways in which former inmates can make significant gains in obtaining decent jobs in the primary employment industry, which is often available to those individuals with the fitting academic credentials.

Gottschalk (2011) argued that socioeconomic status, race, and social inequalities have contributed to increased prison population. Upon release, these former inmates still possess these attributes which ultimately impacts recidivism. With that said, it is necessary for the criminal justice system in the United States to deliver more positive effects on recidivism (Gottschalk, 2011). When examining correctional educational programs, it is important to consider the rates of recidivism as well as the needs of recidivists.

Although considered quite ambitious at the time, prison college programs began in the 1960s with San Quentin being the first (Taylor, 1974). In 1967 Federal City College, an Urban Land grant institution in the United States, began to provide public post-secondary education to the residents of the District of Columbia (Taylor, 1974).



Federal City College was committed to community involvement and academic innovation. Federal City College is now the University of the District of Columbia.

At that time, Federal City College created the Experimental Programs Division to address the concerns or problems of the District of Columbia such as under-employment, drugs, crime, and its residents' ability to access valuable education (Taylor, 1974).

According to Taylor (1974), it was within this division where the Federal City College Lorton Project was established. Federal City College began preparing its college prison project that became known as the Federal City College Lorton Project (Taylor, 1974).

The Federal City College Lorton Project was a collaboration between Federal City College and the District of Columbia's prison known as Lorton Prison.

Lorton inmates demonstrated high motivation for such an educational program. Taylor (1974) contended that because of this high motivation of the inmates, it was decided to move forward with the program, and in June 1969, the official program began with 50 students enrolled. According to Taylor, once inmates enrolled in the program, they were referred to as students and not inmates. One of the motivations for these students was to better care for their children. Taylor reported their typical age of students to be 27 with an average of 2.3 children.

Taylor (1974) said The Lorton Project was divided into three phases. Taylor further said that these phases were institutional, job-readiness training program, and project start. Taylor mentioned that within the institutional phase, students were able to take courses within the correctional facility or participate in the busing program, by which the students were transported from the prison to the college for classes. Because the Lorton Project was a comprehensive post-secondary education program, Taylor said it

was necessary for Federal City College to create coordinate relationships with three main government entities to safeguard the progressive movement of men through each phase of the program.

Taylor (1974) conveyed that the academic program at Lorton provided the overall basic college-wide requirements for those men who were not eligible to participate in the Busing Phase of the Institutional Program. Taylor claimed that it was also determined that when a man has exhausted the course offerings in the institution prior to becoming eligible for educational release (or parole), he is then placed in the Busing Program. Within a 6-year period, Taylor reported that more than 500 men joined the Lorton Project. Although almost 200 men dropped out of the program before finishing a semester, 12 men graduated from Federal City College in June 1973 (Taylor, 1974). These 12 men were the first students to graduate from the Lorton Project with their bachelor's degree (Taylor, 1974).

In a 1989 report, William E. Hyman, then Chief Administrator of the Continuing Education Division of the University of the District of Columbia, declared that the primary goal of the University of the District of Columbia's Lorton Prison College Program is to improve the quality of life for incarcerated citizens of the District in preparation for a more constructive lifestyle upon release. The name later changed to the Lorton College Prison Program. In 1989, Hyman further declared the Lorton Prison College Program offered inmates the opportunity to earn a college degree, which would provide them with a new direction and different options upon release.

### **Problem Statement**

It can be argued that ex-offenders are constantly paying their debt to society. When an individual is sentenced to jail or prison, they often continue to pay for the crime(s) committed after release. Over the years, public policies have evolved regarding ex-offenders, especially as it relates to employment. This is easily visible in their inability to find gainful employment because of their conviction, which often leads to repeat offending behavior. Gottschalk (2011) contended that unemployment is connected to one's return to incarceration. Lack of education is also connected to reincarceration. It seems that adult male ex-offenders are more negatively impacted by such public policies than their female counterparts. The rationale for this study was based on the need to successfully assist ex-offenders re-enter the community. One way to assist ex-offenders is through education.

It is my expectation and desire that my research will be instrumental in promoting social change. Many ex-offenders are fathers with limited educational achievement, and their conviction has prevented them from providing financial support to their children. For those who have earned a high school diploma or GED, post-secondary education is believed to serve as a mechanism to improve the lives of ex-offender as they re-enter the community. On the other hand, for those who do not possess a high school diploma or GED, correctional educational programs can be developed to meet those needs by establishing a GED program within correctional facilities.

Hopefully, this study will impact society by increasing enrollment and retaining formerly incarcerated males in college so that they can obtain additional post-secondary education post-release. Ultimately, this goal can be achieved with inmates receiving post-

secondary education, at least an associate degree, during incarceration which can lead to advanced degrees upon release. Thus, these men are more likely to obtain gainful employment, which will allow them to financially support their children. Subsequently, this will reduce the economic strain on local, state, and federal governments because of the economic and medical assistance provided to low-income families, which are typically female headed households with no or limited financial support from fathers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine correctional educational programs. This qualitative study focused on the Lorton Prison College Program which was in existence from 1969-1996 (Williams, 2017). Correctional facilities have largely eliminated or reduced educational and vocational educational programs offered to inmates. Although some individuals are entering correctional facilities with a high school diploma or GED, most do not possess either. Therefore, there is a significant demand for incarcerated individuals to receive educational opportunities within the correctional facilities. As it was when the Lorton Project was created, lack of educational opportunities, crime, and drugs continue to plague communities today. Education has always been viewed as the most appropriate means to achieve success or the American dream. Consequently, imprisoned persons should be allowed to benefit from educational opportunities because they will be more employable upon release and less likely to reoffend.

The University of the District of Columbia (formerly known as Federal City College) has a very large non-traditional student population of which many of the adult male students are ex-offenders. It is the only public university in the District of

Columbia. More importantly, the University has experienced success working with appropriate agencies to provide educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals, both behind the walls and on the college campus. With the creation of the Community College, the University of the District of Columbia has an opportunity to use the model of the Lorton Project or a similar model based on today's needs.

Since the District of Columbia does not have a prison, the University of the District of Columbia Community College can collaborate with the DC Jail and Youth Services Administration to provide correctional educational programs to both adults and juveniles. As I researched the benefits of correctional educational programs, I concentrated on the Lorton Prison College Program. The Lorton Prison College Program was active for over 25 years, from approximately 1969 to 1996. Most of the participants interviewed in this study participated in the Lorton Prison College Program. Through the lived experiences of the study participants, I gained a better understanding of the research question that shaped the foundation of this study.

### **Research Question**

RQ: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used for this study was Dr. William Benet's polarities of democracy. According to Benet (2013), the framework of polarities of democracy was intended as a coalescing standard to strategize, steer, and assess democratic social change endeavors intended to develop healthy, viable, and just communities. The framework entails five polarity pairs of 10 elements: freedom and authority, justice and due process,

diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation (Benet, 2013). Benet's theoretical framework has been used primarily by Walden University doctoral students with an interest in disadvantaged populations and a desire to promote social change within their communities or globally.

The foundation of polarities of democracy is rooted in the grounded theory design (Benet, 2013). Creswell (2009) defined grounded theory a plan of investigation in which the researcher receives a broad, conceptual idea of a method, act, or communication built on the point of view of participants. Benet (2013) claimed that for democracy to be an efficient instrument to accomplish positive social change, a uniting principle that can connect these discrepancies ought to be uncovered. Benet argued this is especially important granted that positive social change might be required to focus on the financial, environmental, and militaristic obstacles that may jeopardize the existence of mankind. Chapter 2 contains additional conversation concerning these conceivable associations amid the theories and the choice to become involved in correctional educational programs.

### **Nature of the Study**

The technique I chose for this study was a qualitative research method. According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative approach is fitting when the collection of data takes place within the setting of the participants. This study proposed to better understand the perceptions and experiences of former inmates as it relates to their participation in the Lorton Prison College Program, which was a correctional educational program. The study used the phenomenological approach. In the phenomenological approach, the

information collected by the researchers is based on the lived experiences of study participants from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2009).

### **Definitions**

*Correctional education*: educational classes that take place within a correctional facility.

*Incarceration*: the isolation of individuals from society by confining them to a correctional facility as they await trial for a crime, they have been accused of committing or for the punishment of the crime(s) committed (Siegel & Bartollas, 2018).

*Offender*: an individual who has been convicted of a crime and sentenced to serve time in a correctional facility for committing that crime (Abadinsky, 2018).

*Parole*: the release of a prison inmate prior to the expiration of sentence by a board authorized to make such a decision, followed by a period of supervision by a parole officer.

*Probation*: a community punishment that requires the offender to comply with certain court-ordered conditions (Abadinsky, 2018).

*Recidivism*: the return to criminal activity of persons previously convicted of crimes (Abadinsky, 2018).

*Recidivism rates*: the percentage of those who return to crime once a sentence has been served (Abadinsky, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

I made several assumptions at the beginning of this study. I assumed that participants of the study would: (a) answer the questions openly and honestly, (b) fully cooperate and complete the interview process, and (c) inform me if they were no longer

able to keep their appointment or inform me if they were no longer interested in participating in the research study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this qualitative research study involved interviewing five African American men who participated in correctional education programs. The gender and number of participants limited the study due to the scope of the study. The gender of the participants limited the study because most of the participants in the Lorton Prison College Program were male. In general, the main delimitation was all study participants interviewed were from the Washington DC metropolitan area. The results of the study were limited to the participants of a correctional education program and not members of prison administrators or instructors. The results of the study cannot be generalized to all correctional education programs in the United States or globally. More importantly, the findings cannot be generalized to female offenders.

### **Limitations**

The number of participants was a limitation to the study. The participants of the study were five African American men who participated in a correctional education program. Although study participants were involved in correctional education programs at various prisons throughout the US, the study concentrated on formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in the Lorton Prison College Program and post-secondary correctional education programs. Time constraints limited the study due to scheduling conflicts because of study participants' work schedules.



### **Significance**

The objective of this study was to analyze the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated men and their assessments of correctional education programs. Based on my interviews with the study participants, this study validates the need for correctional educational programs and should influence appropriate decision makers to develop and sustain such programs. More importantly, this study contributes to the current body of literature as it relates to correctional educational programs. This research is important to public policy and administration because the end goal is to assist ex-offenders become more marketable for employment because of their post-secondary education which will potentially offset their criminal background. I hope that this study will change the perception employers will have about ex-offenders.

Therefore, it is important for post-secondary institutions to collaborate with correctional facilities to provide correctional educational programs so that incarcerated individuals can complete their education and obtain gainful employment. Like the Lorton Prison Program, contemporary correctional educational programs can provide two phases, one focusing on the education taking place behind the walls and the other by transporting (minor offenders and/or offenders considered not dangerous) to the college campus.

The results of this study provided insight into the barriers the college presents to ex-offenders and to influence policies to better serve students who are ex-offenders. Moreover, it can at least begin the conversation of providing correctional education programs to enhance the lives of former inmates as they reintegrate into society. Hence,

this study helps fill the gap in the literature regarding the perception and benefits of correctional education programs.

### **Summary**

Correctional education programs have a long-lasting history as it relates to the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals. However, Palmer (2012) contended that many prison college programs ended because of the increased political motivation to prevent inmates from getting federal funding, such as the Pell Grant, for college. Palmer furthered the point by saying though studies connecting education to decreased recidivism, correctional education programs have been attacked by tough-on-crime advocates, politicians, and public outrage led to severe reductions in federal and state funding. Palmer claimed that those inmates who participated in educational programs at the postsecondary level reported that they were better able to evaluate and judge their actions, which can indicate an increased incentive to evade conflict both in and out of prison. Chapter 2 encompasses an evaluation of existing literature chosen to support the theoretical framework and research methodology of this study. The evaluation includes a discussion of correctional education programs and gaps in the research to justify the need of this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Offender reentry was the phenomenon of interest in this study. I focused on correctional education programs while exploring the Lorton Prison College Program. The Lorton Prison College Program was a correctional educational program whereby a collaboration existed between Lorton Prison and Federal City College which is now known as the University of the District of Columbia. It was Owens's (2009) contention that 95% of convicted felons will return to society. Owens further claimed that a postsecondary education is a specific intervention that can be used to assist individuals returning to the community after years of incarceration. Thus, correctional educational programs are worthwhile to explore.

It has been suggested that correctional education programs can reduce recidivism rates among those individuals released from correctional institutions. It has also been suggested that former inmates enrolled in college classes after their release can also reduce recidivism. Potts and Palmer (2014) reported that the parolees interviewed shared they will less likely return to prison because they are using their time wisely by attending college classes. By attending college classes, these parolees will spend more time engaged in academic studies and less time hanging out on the streets which often leads to inappropriate or criminal behaviors.

Former inmates often carry the stigma of being a convicted person when returning to the community from a period of incarceration. With the stigma of incarceration also comes the inability to obtain gainful employment. Therefore, a convicted individual returning to the community can improve their employment opportunities with education,

skills, or training. Nally et al. (2014) conducted a study that showed a former inmate's education and employment upon release were meaningfully and statistically connected to recidivism irrespective of the classification of the offender. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of offenders and their viewpoint as it relates to their participation in the correctional education program offered through the Lorton Prison College Program and other prisons in the United States.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The original search of the literature was restricted to the previous 5-year period (2015-2020). Though, over the years, it seems as if correctional education has not been a consistent interest of scholars researching prisoner re-entry. Consequently, I extended my search beyond the 5 years because of the restricted number of resources obtainable to support the research question published during the previous 5 years. The articles selected for this study are seminal in nature which establishes a basis and trustworthiness.

The following terms were used to guide the research: correctional education, correctional educational programs, prison population, confinement, offender perspective, parolee, ex-offenders, prison, prison release, re-entry programs, re-entry, social reintegration, recidivism, incarceration, sentencing, education, post-secondary education, community college, and community college education.

The search for related articles led to the inclusion of various journals and books. Several sources of information were used to collect data during the literature search. As articles were found using the various search strategies, I evaluated references previous authors used to identify additional resources the over-all search did not discover.

Primarily, the references for the literature review were collected using the online databases ProQuest and Ebsco Host. However, the online Walden University Library provided many of the articles needed for this literature review. SAGE Premier, Google Scholar, and LexisNexis were additional sources used to locate articles. Every source provided noteworthy understanding into the complexity of correctional education and the inmates who participated in the programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Benet (2013), polarities of democracy is a framework intended as a uniting model to guide, assess, and plan social change efforts intended to shape just, sustainable, and healthy communities within a democratic society. Polarities of democracy encompasses 10 fundamentals organized in the following five polarity pairs: representation and participation; authority and freedom; equality and diversity; due process and justice; and communal obligations and human rights. Polarities of democracy has been used primarily by Walden University doctoral students with an interest in disadvantaged populations and a desire to promote social change within their specific communities or globally.

The foundation of polarities of democracy is rooted in the grounded theory design (Benet, 2013). Creswell (2009) defined grounded theory as an approach used by researchers to obtain a broad, conceptual theory of a method, engagement, or communication supported by the beliefs of participants. Benet (2013) claimed that for democracy to be an efficient instrument to accomplish positive social change, a uniting principle that can connect these discrepancies ought to be uncovered. Benet argued this is especially important granted that positive social change might be required to focus on

the financial, environmental, and militaristic obstacles that may jeopardize the existence of mankind.

### **Review of the Literature**

Correctional educational programs have a wide-ranging influence on the lives of convicted individuals during their incarceration and after their release. The subsequent literature review delivers an understanding of the effects correctional educational programs have on recidivism and gainful employment of formerly incarcerated individuals.

### **An Historic Overview**

Correctional education is viewed as a complicated characteristic of the rehabilitative efforts within the correctional system, which ultimately impacts the criminal justice system. Although it is widely held that college education programs were implemented in the 1960s, Gehring (1997) mentioned that post-secondary education institutions and correctional facilities collaborated in educating inmates many years prior to the 1960s, albeit not as expansive as the programs that began in the 1960s.

Gehring (1997) explained that post-secondary correctional education dates as far back as 1834 when Harvard Divinity College collaborated with Massachusetts State Prison by allowing tutors from the Divinity College to work with their inmates on a weekly basis. However, in the 20th century correctional educational programs became more robust by offering GED programs, correspondence courses, live college instruction, and education furlough programs (Gehring, 1997).

Nally et al. (2012) contended that over the last several decades, there has been an increased rate of incarcerated individuals, in which many of those individuals were found

to be underemployed and uneducated. Correctional educational programs have been viewed as an invaluable rehabilitative strategy due to the increased number of offenders who are undereducated or uneducated (Nally et al., 2012). According to Anders and Noblit (2011), due to the substantial surge in the prison population throughout the United States, educational programs implemented within correctional facilities can be perceived as a method of managing the lives of inmates and reducing recidivism. Anders and Noblit also believed correctional education programs can potentially improve the life-altering probabilities of former inmates as well.

It is important to note that mass incarceration in the United States is an economic, moral, and societal catastrophe with grave consequences for countless undereducated individuals and men of color incarcerated at proportionately higher rates than those with more education and their White counterparts (Schwartz, 2015). With that said, Schwartz (2015) argued that inadequate educational possibilities and mass incarceration are interconnecting civil rights issues. Mageehon (2003) presented that inmates with positive school experiences preceding incarceration were more likely to take part of and complete correctional education programs during their incarceration.

Adult basic education, literacy, vocational training, GED courses, and post-secondary education are the most common forms of correctional education programs (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) argued that many earlier studies only focused on one form of educational programs. However, when examining correctional education, Tewksbury and Stengel discussed the importance of assessing the broad range of educational programs encompassed within the correctional environment. Therefore, it is important to know the level of education those entering correctional

facilities possess in deciding the most appropriate program to increase the likelihood of them completing the program successfully (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006).

Most researchers focused on the impact correctional education programs have on recidivism. Vacca (2004) reasoned that effective education programs require money to fill the gap in an inmate's academic and vocational experiences which leads to a reduction in recidivism and its related costs and ability to increase an inmate's opportunity to lead a fruitful life. Vacca found that inmates released from prison were often incapable of obtaining employment because of their deficient literacy skills and/or experience. Therefore, Vacca argued that literacy skill development might be a proactive method in addressing recidivism because of the high price of incarceration and the upsurge in the prison population. In many ways, literacy skills are essential for inmates (Vacca, 2004). According to Vacca, literacy skills are advantageous to inmates because they allow them to complete forms and write correspondences to those outside prison. Vacca maintained correctional educational programs, in the beginning, ought to stress real-world applications of literacy so inmates can use recently acquired skills and awareness.

### **Recidivism**

James (2014) argued that recidivism of previous lawbreakers continues to be a noteworthy problem nationwide. However, there is not a consistent definition of recidivism used among researchers. Yet, the central theme within all definitions of recidivism is the commission of crimes by formerly incarcerated individuals. While Abadinsky (2018) defined recidivism as the return to criminal activity of persons previously convicted of crimes, May and Brown (2011) defined recidivism as frequently



engaging in objectionable actions after undergoing negative penalties for those actions following treatment received to stop such actions. May and Brown identified the main criticism of the reentry of the formerly incarcerated to be the absence of a fixed measure for recidivism.

Severson et al. (2012) noted that the United States Midwest Reentry Program defined recidivism as a return to prison aimed at any purpose which comprises the revocation of parole or the conviction for new criminal offenses. According to Duwe and King (2012), within their scope in studying the Minnesota State InterChange Program, recidivism was defined based on the viewpoint of wrongdoings aimed at recurring criminal behavior as well as new crimes. In their study, Duwe and King used a new sentence, rearrests, a single reconviction, reincarceration, or revocation for any procedural violation as variables. A new sentence, rearrests, and reconviction were the variables used to measure new rule-breaking offenses, while the revocation for any procedural violation was the variable used to measure wide-ranging illegal behavior (Duwe & King, 2012).

Severson et al. (2012) claimed that the outcome of the discrepancy in defining recidivism is the difficulty modeled for equating the consequences of countless reentry and correctional initiatives intended to address recidivism. Thus, reincarceration can be viewed as the chief variable used to define recidivism. Consequently, if an individual is found guilty of a crime, reincarceration is the result of reoffending behavior, rearrests, and reconviction. Accordingly, it should be noted that many scholars have been advocating for a standardized measure or definition of recidivism.

There are several persuading issues that contribute to the reincarceration of prisoners once released from prison. Numerous researchers have tried to identify those issues that possibly will expose or entice formerly incarcerated individuals to engage in illegal behaviors that result in reincarceration. Countless economic, social, and political issues influence illegal activities of formerly incarcerated individuals which leads to reconviction and reincarceration. It also should be noted that the reincarceration of formerly incarcerated individuals can be linked to declining correctional and inmate reentry programs in addition to the punitive and occasionally inhumane criminal justice system.

### **Issues Impacting Recidivism**

McFarlane (2012) studied the effect of the worldwide economic recession, also known as the great recession, that began in 2007, on America's criminal justice system. In the study, McFarlane detected the predominant effect of the economic decline on the criminal justice system. As more individuals engaged in illegal behaviors that led to their incarceration because of the economic and financial complications, problems arose for criminal justice administrators, the courts, and the nation's prison system (McFarlane, 2012). Prison overcrowding was caused by the rise in incarcerations which limited the ability of inmates to fully participate in reentry programs because many of the inmates were trying to survive.

To reduce prison overcrowding, many inmates were released on parole (McFarlane, 2012). Due to the increased number of inmates being released, McFarlane (2012) contended that communities were at risk of experiencing an increase in criminal activities. It was argued that these formerly incarcerated individuals were more likely

released without any form of reentry programs, increasing the likelihood of them recidivating. The economic downturn is an issue that has also contributed to offenders' inability to satisfy their debts, such as steep fees and fines imposed by the courts.

As offenders become frustrated and struggle to satisfy these financial penalties, many of these offenders are tempted to reoffend and face reincarceration (Carter & Adcock, 2015). The contention of Carter and Adcock (2015) is the judgement of the public views such penalties as shameful and counterproductive that require review. In contrast, supporters of such harsh penalties believe such penalties are necessary in generating revenue during a declining economy. In Oklahoma, Carter and Adcock claimed that such fees and fines contributed to the state budget that provides funding for mental health programs, the criminal justice system, hospital maintenance, bridges, roads, and schools.

As it relates to incarcerated individuals in the state of Oklahoma, Carter and Adcock (2015) found an upsurge in reincarcerations because of the harsh fines and fees imposed by the courts and correctional facilities. Oftentimes, these fines and fees increase and continue to be unpaid while these individuals remain incarcerated (Carter & Adcock, 2015). Carter and Adcock contended that formerly incarcerated individuals cannot enjoy a steady and safe life because of the impediments created by the pressure to satisfy these penalties post release. According to Carter and Adcock, the frustration of formerly incarcerated individuals to pay these fines and fees tend to increase recidivism.

Over the years, researchers have argued that imprisonment is not an effective crime deterrent that ultimately reduces recidivism. Cullen et al. (2011) maintained that the significance of imprisonment on recidivism is primarily criminogenic. Instead of

reducing criminality of convicts, prisons create additional difficulties for formerly incarcerated individuals' community reintegration which tend to ignite the overriding high rate of recidivism (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). Wright et al. (2014) believed that recidivism should be the focus of correctional programs.

Social issues should be considered when studying recidivism. Gutierrez et al. (2013) believed that antisocial behaviors and those formerly incarcerated individuals with greater rates of antisocial behavior are indicators for potential recidivism. It should be noted that recidivism and issues impacting recidivism are not unique to the United States. Ginner and Smedler (2011) examined the consequence of antisocial behaviors as a causative factor relating to recidivism among young male Swedish offenders between the ages of 15 and 17. They further examined criminality among youthful offenders who participated in a community-based rehabilitative program (Ginner & Smedler, 2011).

Andrews and Bonta (2010) studied offenders within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to determine whether risk indicators can be applied to them in predicting recidivism. Andrews and Bonta determined antisocial personality pattern, pro-criminal associates, and criminal histories were the greatest predictors amid these groups instead of their social, cultural, and economic differences.

There are several additional factors found to be a catalyst for recidivism amongst formerly incarcerated individuals (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012). Wikoff et al. (2012) identified those factors as seclusion and stigmatization of formerly incarcerated individuals, economic complications, gender, age, and limited legal resources in obtaining public services. Abrifor, Atere, and Muoghalu (2012) studied the customary recidivism rates among formerly incarcerated men in Nigeria. In that study, it was

revealed that behavioral characteristics may be multifaceted and specific to each offender (Abrifor et al., 2012).

According to Osayi (2013), between 2007 and 2011, the surge in new crimes and recidivism became a noteworthy social issue impacting society, the government, and humanitarian organizations worldwide. Local, state, and federal government agencies have attempted to reduce recidivism by increasing jail and prison sentences as a crime deterrent. Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014) claimed that professionals within the criminal justice system lack the knowledge and understanding of effective strategies to reduce recidivism. To identify the best methods to address concerns of recidivism, Polaschek (2012) asserted that government administrators used simulation modeling.

According to Hall (2015), employment, marital status, race, gender, and age are all risk factors associated with recidivism. Hall maintained that joblessness is frequently a common issue hindering lawbreakers, frequently contributing to the lawbreaker's decision to engage in lawbreaking behavior. The level of one's education can also be viewed as a risk factor associated with recidivism (Hall, 2015). However, correctional education and post-release employment may be the best approaches in reducing recidivism. Duwe and Clark (2014) postulated that an inmate with correctional education accomplishment is more likely to obtain employment and less likely to recidivate. Duwe and Clark argued that employment obtained by formerly incarcerated individuals keeps them busy and reduces their enticement to participate in criminal behavior. According to Duwe and Clark, the most significant impact on recidivism is post-secondary programming. Post-secondary correctional education programs increase the probabilities

of a formerly incarcerated individuals to find employment after release and decreases the probability of recidivism (Duwe & Clark, 2014).

### **Correctional Education**

Due to the rapid changing landscape of communities across America, returning to the community after a period of incarceration is difficult for all former inmates. Former inmates, regardless of their length of incarceration, are challenged with navigating and adjusting to the change that has taken place within their communities. Many former inmates entered correctional facilities with less education and impoverished conditions. If they return the community with those same educational and income deficiencies, they are more likely to recidivate and return to a period of incarceration. Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, and Lindahl (2009) pointed out that first-class education opportunities are not readily available to the countless individuals involved with the criminal justice system, despite its likelihood of changing lives.

Consequently, it is important for former inmates to return to the community better than when they left, especially when it comes to their level of education. It was the contention of Pryor and Thompkins (2013) that correctional education programs are significant for the inmate population because they tend to have more minority men, with lower income and with a lower degree of educational attainment. Pryor and Thompkins argued that if inmates are not permitted to or provided access to enroll and complete correction educational programs, many of the inmates being released from incarceration are less likely to have education beyond a GED or high school diploma.

Pryor and Thompkins (2013) asserted that education is an essential factor needed for former inmates to positively reintegrate within the community. Pryor and Thompkins

believed that the positive impact of correctional education can be measured by its capability to produce better citizens. According to Hrabowski and Robbi (2002), numerous studies on correctional education revealed that educational instruction behind prison walls had an optimistic influence on decreasing recidivism.

Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) claimed that more than 95% of incarcerated individuals with a felony conviction would be released from imprisonment. Hrabowski and Robbi further claimed existing research offers a clear depiction that one main advantage of correctional education is to decrease recidivism. Duwe and Clark (2014) suggested that the expansion of available college-level education for inmates is more likely associated with employers growing educational mandates. Duwe and Clark recognized that acquiring a college degree will less likely eradicate the stigma associated with a criminal history, but the degree can assist formerly incarcerated individuals become more marketable in the employment industry.

Stevens and Ward (1997) studied 60 former inmates exploring the result of correctional education's ability to decrease re-offending behavior throughout North Carolina. A key finding of the study was, of the ex-offenders who earned a bachelor's degree, none recidivated at the 3-year period after their release from incarceration. Stevens and Ward reported, of the ex-offenders who earned an associate degree, five recidivated during the same 3-year period. Stevens and Ward conveyed their data was compared to the collection of general population statistics throughout North Carolina across a similar time frame. Stevens and Ward found that 40% of ex-offenders within the general population recidivated during the same period. According to Stevens and Ward,

similar findings were revealed when comparing other correctional facilities throughout the country.

During the 1970s, general education development and adult basic education were the educational programs extensively used within correctional institutions. Correctional education programs were expanded to post-secondary programs because they were supported and viewed as playing a vital role in the rehabilitation of those incarcerated (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). Over time, the evolution of correctional education programs has come with its supporters as well as its critics (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). The number of critics began to increase and gain momentum during the 1980s.

According to Ubah (2004), many correctional education programs were terminated due to a reduction in policymakers' support because of the change in the public's perception of such programs. Ubah believed the most radical change that impacted correctional education programs was the abolition of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals. Due to a provision contained within The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, state and federal inmates were barred from Pell Grant eligibility (Mastrorilli, 2016). Before the early 1990s, inmates were able to take part in postsecondary academic programs largely due to their ability to use Pell Grants which paid for the courses (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013).

The abolition of Pell Grants was a major barrier for those inmates interested in participating in correctional educational programs. The abolition of Pell Grants available to prison inmates drastically reduced the number of inmates enrolled in postsecondary academic programs within correctional institutions (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). After the abolition of Pell Grants, Crayton and Neusteter (2008) noted that there was a 44% decline



among inmates participating in postsecondary correctional academic programs. Pryor and Thompkins (2013) pointed out that the abolition of Pell Grants also led to the decrease in correctional education services and its ability to produce effective community reentry for former inmates. Despite research findings suggesting that funding is required for inmate correctional education programs, political leaders have repeatedly tried to eradicate funding (Hall, 2015).

Although there is value in correctional education programs, evidence proposes that academic instruction behind prison walls is frequently unsuccessful in accomplishing its goal of inmate involvement and completion (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Additionally, these factors hinder its capability to render those promised opportunities for employment outside those prison walls (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Brazzell et al. (2009) argued that access to academic instruction is predominantly significant given existing fiscal trends.

Crayton and Neusteter (2008) revealed those adults on community supervision and returning from correctional facilities remain devastatingly undereducated in comparison to everyday Americans with less formal academic achievement and perform less on basic literacy tests. It should be noted that correction educational programs and communities can offer persons involved in the criminal justice system vocational training, education, and intellectual and life skills desired for success in today's economy, if appropriately planned and executed (Brazzell et al., 2009).

Inmates' ability to complete correctional education programs is another barrier to be addressed. It is difficult for inmates to overcome such a barrier because they can be transferred from one institution to another with little or no notice. When an inmate is

transferred from one institution to another, the inmate's ability to finish an academic program is disrupted. Brazzell et al. (2009) said it is a frequent occurrence because programs available at one facility may not be available at the subsequent facility. For those participating in post-secondary education programs, credits earned at one facility are not transferrable to the next when such educational programs are not available at the subsequent facility. When inmates are transferred, the non-transferrable credits often halt any progress made by inmates.

In addition to being unable to complete correction education programs because of transfers, inmates are also unable to complete the programs due to their release from incarceration (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). The failure of former inmates to complete correction education programs means it becomes necessary for them to take part in academic programs to complete their education outside of prison. This becomes challenging or disheartening because, like the issue of non-transferrable credits from one institution to another, former inmates are also unable to transfer credits from correctional institutions to academic programs within the community.

Assuming the ability of correction education programs to assist in the decrease of recidivism, Brazzell et al. (2009) believed former inmates should be given the chance to continue their academic endeavors after release from incarceration. According to Pryor and Thompkins (2013), many former inmates do not possess the financial means to engage in educational programs within their communities. In addition to financial barriers, Oliver (2010) found that there are numerous barriers that possibly prohibit former inmates' ability to finish their education. Crayton and Neusteter (2008) noted that some former inmates might conceivably encounter other obstacles grounded in the

requirements of their parole or probation that will likely prevent them from pursuing their academic endeavors after release.

### **Likely Participants in Correctional Education**

Klein and Tolbert (2007) reported that nearly half of all incarcerated individuals in state and federal correctional facilities take part in correctional education, with preference frequently granted to inmates facing imminent release or the highest necessity for education. Many prisoners lack the completion of secondary and post-secondary education needed to be economically successful in society. However, Runell (2016) noted that some inmate students arrived at correctional facilities with excellent levels of educational accomplishment which positioned them with better insight toward post-secondary education. This insight allowed them to view post-secondary education as a mechanism for change, enrollment in classes at the post-secondary level, and concentrate on the content of the courses in spite of related challenges associated to their confinement (Runell, 2016). In addition, many prisoners possess insufficient employment histories and employment skills (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Therefore, it was the contention of Austin and Hardyman (2004) that before their incarceration many inmates did not have stable employment which is often leads to criminal behavior. As a result, Visher, Debus-Sherill, and Yahner (2010) argued that many of these inmates committed criminal offenses to get money to take care of their families. Although most inmates are excited about being release from incarceration, they are also concerned about obtaining a job and taking care of themselves and their families once released.

Correctional education programs can be viewed by inmates as a means of being successful upon release from incarceration. Therefore, many may decide to participate in the best correctional education program to meet their specific needs. Hall and Killacky (2008) found motivation to be a noteworthy underpinning of accomplishment. According to Pelissier and Jones (2006), it is important to understand the motivation of inmates to begin and finish correctional education programs. The motivation of inmates to involve themselves in correctional education programs is important to note and cannot be understated (Pelissier & Jones, 2006). An inmate student's inspiration to modify his behavior and participate in classes is likewise connected to the inmate's remorse of previous actions that contributed to him dropping out of school as well as confinement (Hall & Killacky, 2008).

An inmate's desire to engage in a correctional education program may come from within or an outside force. Participation in most correctional education programs is voluntary. However, an inmate may be required to participate in such a program by the judge or it may be mandated by the correctional facility (Visher et al., 2010). Most correctional facilities provide an opportunity for inmates to earn credits for good time. Pelissier (2004) acknowledged that one may be allowed to earn good time credits by participating in a correctional education program, which may motivate an inmate to participate. Some inmate students said their participation in postsecondary correctional education was a way to mentally escape their incarceration, albeit temporarily (Runell, 2016).

Parkinson and Steurer (2004) believed that an inmate's required involvement in such programs can be problematic because many inmates do not recognize the

significance or importance of becoming involved. Parkinson and Steurer noted that inmates with poor academic performances in the past may not want to participate in such programs. On the other hand, Osberg and Fraley (1993) believed, on average, inmates were more inspired than their non-incarcerated counterparts to attend and successfully complete college level courses. It can be argued that some inmates participate in correctional education programs to impress members of their family. The ability for family members to attend graduation ceremonies held in correctional facilities motivates inmates to finish the programs they started (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004).

### **Prisoner Reentry and Its Challenges**

With an overwhelming number of imprisoned individuals returning to the general population, prisoner reintegration remains to be a substantial problem (Miller & Miller, 2015). It has been contended that correctional systems within the United States are not appropriately preparing prisoners, who will be freed from confinement, with the essential direction and skills to decrease the overall recidivism rate among these individuals (Braga, Piehl, & Hureau, 2009). Gunnison and Helfgott (2017) argued that every former incarcerated individual requires help with more than just their basic needs as they return to their communities.

Berg and Huebner (2011) cited the lack of mental health services, affordable and safe housing, and appropriate employment prospects as the most common problems faced by formerly incarcerated persons. Braga et al. (2009) argued that correctional reentry programs are more likely to be effective if they are designed to meet the individual needs inmates instead of a broad, generic approach. It was the claim of Piehl (2009) that many reentry programs are created and shaped within the official realm of correctional

facilities. Piehl also claimed that these reentry programs are intended to meet the needs of a small segment of their inmate population.

According to Miller and Miller (2015), it is the aim of prisoner reentry rehabilitation programs to address issues, such as lack of education, job opportunities, and mental health services, by providing formerly incarcerated individuals with supervision and support required to be successful in the community. However, Glaze and Kaeble (2014) argued that local and state governments do not assist formerly incarcerated individuals during their transition because these government agencies do not deliver effective reentry programs.

Jonson and Cullen (2015) proclaimed that releasing ex-offenders back into the community is a solemn matter that necessitates suitable supervision. Rehabilitation programs behind prison walls can have a positive impact on prisoner reentry. James (2015) believed that it is the obligation of prison administrators to start preparing incarcerated individuals for reintegration as soon as possible to prevent those individuals from becoming institutionalized. James also believed that prison administrators should unceasingly attempt to encourage effective reentry of incarcerated persons.

Morenoff and Harding (2014) noted that most incarcerated individuals are ultimately released. Redcross, Bloom, Jacobs, Manno, Muller-Ravett, Seefeldt, and Zweig (2010) reported that many former inmates reentering their communities comprised primarily of low-level drug offenders. Drug offenders as well as other criminal offenders are responsible for paying their debt to society. For many, this debt is paid by spending a period of incarceration within a correctional facility. Though community service is characteristically debated in relation to “payback” as a type of punishment, it can be

connected in imaginative ways in backing the reintegration of former inmates and desistance procedures (Graham, Graham, & Field, 2015).

Many people in the United States are beginning to understand and believe that prisoners will be released from incarceration. Therefore, it is important to put some measures in place to prevent them from committing future crimes after their release and keeping the community safe. It can be said that former President George W. Bush may have shared this same viewpoint. In January 2004, during his state of the union address, President George W. Bush appealed to every American citizen claiming that ex-offenders returning to their communities deserve a second chance (The Whitehouse, 2004).

The risk of reincarceration is a challenge faced by all formerly incarcerated individuals for many reasons. President George W. Bush acknowledged that formerly incarcerated individuals are justified in looking forward to an improved life (The Whitehouse, 2004). According to Jonson and Cullen (2015), President George W. Bush later passed the Second Chance Act of 2008 which resulted from the proposed \$300 million reentry initiative for formerly incarcerated individuals to increase their opportunities. This can be viewed as a necessary step in assisting formerly incarcerated to combat issues that may contribute to reoffending behavior post release.

Prisoner reentry can be described as interventions that support prisons' objectives of correcting criminal behavior among its inmates (Wright et al., 2014). Although there are views on both sides, it should be noted that prisoner reentry is an element of the landscape of the correctional system in addition to wide range of prison concerns, the courts, and criminal justice issues. According to Durose et al. (2014), prisoner reentry

encompasses approaches and activities formulated to prepare these individuals for a safe return to society.

Jonson and Cullen (2015) declared that the all-encompassing goal of prisoner reentry is to prepare inmates emotionally and mentally for life in the external community and to guarantee inmates behave in a socially accountable way after they have reentered the community. Marier and Alfredo (2014) found that those formerly incarcerated individuals who utilize rehabilitative and supportive services improved their quality of life and were less likely to recidivate.

Jonson and Cullen (2015) reasoned that the meaning of prisoner reentry is not simply a transformative term. They further reasoned that a failed reentry program can weaken public assurance, impend public safety, and move offenders toward engaging in more criminal activities (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). It was also acknowledged that a weak reentry intervention establishes a peril for formerly incarcerated individuals as they are exposed to societal pressures which impacts reoffending nevertheless a well-developed and well-executed prisoner entry intervention can lessen or eliminate recidivism (Jonson & Cullen, 2015).

Notwithstanding the overall support of reentry programs, Petersilia and Cullen (2015) recognized that additional efforts are still needed to make these programs more effective. Therefore, the test is the way formerly incarcerated individuals are returned to the community so that their return will not endanger their wellbeing and the wellbeing of society at large. Even though there is no conclusive evidence to propose that prisoner reentry interventions are effective, Petersilia and Cullen maintained that there is no



foregone conclusion that the efficiency of prisoner reentry interventions is vital for minimizing public safety and recidivism.

Because many incarcerated individuals are released, it can be argued that prisoner reentry is an accepted reality of imprisonment (Miller & Miller, 2015). Glaze and Kaeble (2014) argued that reintegration into society is a realistic opportunity for most incarcerated persons. It was the contention of Glaze and Kaeble that, upon their release, formerly incarcerated individuals bring with them their prison experiences and the culture within the prison system which ultimately impacts their involvement and success in community reentry programs.

As formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society, they often encounter numerous challenges, such as unemployment, homelessness, and lack of support from family members during their rehabilitation process (Gideon & Sung, 2012). Although the initiatives of correctional facilities exist to assist prisoners integrate into the community post-release, Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014) acknowledged that formerly incarcerated individuals frequently lose the enhancements learned from those initiatives as a result of the lack of effective support and follow-up. For formerly incarcerated individuals to be successful, supervision and some level of support is essential (Latessa, 2012). According to Latessa (2012), clear concerns linked to reintegration such as help with affordable and safe housing, as well as job training and placement were identified as serious components needed for effective reentry.

There is no question that many Americans believe public secondary education is an entitlement because it is accessible to individuals who take advantage of it because it is of no cost to those who pursue it (Williams, 2017). Therefore, one can argue that

public secondary education is an American right. However, Williams (2017) noted that many Americans believe it is a privilege for those individuals who choose to enroll in a post-secondary institution. These differing perspectives contribute to the debate over whether post-secondary education is a right or a privilege. In America, it has been a widely held belief that post-secondary education is a privilege because it is not for everyone, but, instead only for the greatest and the brightest (Williams, 2017).

Nevertheless, Williams (2017) argued that some of those living in inner-city underclass communities are trapped in the brutal series of lawbreaking, apprehension, and incarceration, which resulted to some of the best and brightest within those communities turning to harmful deeds that tend to satisfy their uneducated intelligences.

According to Zoukis (2014), the law ordered each federal prison to provide a multipurpose library and offer each inmate lacking a high school diploma the opportunity to pursue a GED. Proponents of correctional education programs contend that these programs are more likely to yield a greater return on investment (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) proposed that this is a “value-added” technique that contends it is considerably more economical to invest in correctional education programs than it is to incarcerate an inmate many times throughout his lifespan. As a result, education and training a former inmate is more likely to become employed after release (Williams, 2017). With sought-after skills and education, former inmates are less likely to recidivate; however, without such skills and education, the likelihood of recidivism increases (Williams, 2017).

The debate over providing post-secondary correctional education is like the debate whether post-secondary education, in general, is a right or a privilege. Williams

(2017) noted that opponents to post-secondary correctional education argue that upstanding taxpayers do not have enough money to pay for their children to enroll in college; therefore, law breakers should not have access to post-secondary education at the cost of taxpayers. This viewpoint contributes to the notion that inmates should be punished and not rehabilitated.

Proponents of post-secondary correctional education believe inmates should be educated because they will one day return to the community. Williams (2017) said in the interest of public safety, supporters of post-secondary correctional education argue that it is a right and the country should move toward educating all citizens because it cannot be predicted who will benefit society. According to Williams (2017), studies show that it is more expensive to incarcerate an individual for a year than it is to pay for a year of college in-state tuition. Therefore, inmates granted the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education are more likely to obtain employment and are less likely to recidivate (Williams, 2017).

### **The Lorton Prison College Program**

All states within the United States have prisons for individuals convicted of felony offenses and sentenced to serve a period of incarceration within a state prison. Washington, DC is not a state and it did not have a prison within its geographical boundary because it does not have enough land to construct a prison. Therefore, individuals convicted of felonies and sentenced to serve a prison sentence within Washington, DC had to serve their sentence outside the city limits at Lorton Prison. Individuals convicted and sentenced to a prison sentence in Washington, DC were

required to spend their period of incarceration at the Lorton Prison, during its operation, which was in Fairfax County, VA.

When the Lorton Prison College Program began, Washington, DC was plagued with high crime rates, unemployment, and drug addiction (Taylor, 1974). The Lorton Prison College Program was an initiative to combat unemployment/underemployment for ex-offenders once released from prison. In 1968 Washington DC, possibly more melodramatically than any other jurisdiction in America, the city was ready for a fundamental, ground-breaking tactic to extract from the scheme of the manpower that vanished from Washington (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) asserted that the Lorton Prison College Program was intended to be a retreat and focal point in the middle of a fluctuating and mounting storm.

The Lorton Prison College Program was an endeavor to assist ex-offenders successfully transition back into their communities within Washington, DC. With the attainment of an associate degree and/or bachelor's degree, it was believed that many ex-offenders from Lorton Prison would have an opportunity to increase employability upon release. Many believed that there was a connection between lower recidivism and correctional education, which in this case was specific to the Lorton Prison College Program and male residents of Washington, DC returning home after a period of incarceration.

One of the early administrators of the Lorton Prison College Program provided an insider's perspective of this correctional education program. From 1979 to 1994, Williams worked at the University of the District of Columbia's Lorton Prison College Program (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) noted that Lorton Prison was originally

named Lorton Reformatory and then called Lorton Correctional Complex. At the time, a unique feature of the Lorton Correctional Complex was that it was the only prison in the U.S. to house male inmates of all classifications.

Williams (2017) reported that in 1968 discussions began regarding the implementation of academic programs within Lorton Prison. Williams (2017) further reported that the Lorton Prison College Program was a cooperative venture amongst the District of Columbia Department of Corrections and Federal City College (now known as the University of the District of Columbia). Discussions about a post-secondary program for prison inmates began when the District of Columbia Department of Corrections administrators and Federal City College officials began to understand the extremely driven inmates detained at the Lorton Prison Complex were not benefiting from their current programs.

According to Taylor (1974) the Lorton Prison Program began in 1969 at the country's first urban land grant institution, Federal City College. As an urban land grant institution, Federal City College maintained a vigorous obligation to academic innovation and civic participation (Taylor, 1974). According to Williams (2017) the correctional complex consisted of a cluster of correctional facilities: minimum, medium, and maximum-security units as well as youth centers I and II. The focus of the Lorton Prison College Program, formerly known as the Lorton Project, was inmates housed in the central facility which was the medium security unit (Williams, 2017). According to Williams, inmates in the central facility were not housed in cellblocks but in a dormitory style unit. The structure of the prisoner's sentence, remaining time, and additional conditions were determining factors used by the Department of Corrections, by means of

its college coordinating committee, to recommend prisoners for the college program (William, 2017).

Theoretically, the Lorton Prison College Program could be viewed as an ambitious initiative serving as a response to inmate discontent (Williams, 2017). The correctional facilities within the Lorton Complex were unsafe and overcrowded (Williams, 2017). The inmates at Lorton objected to their existence as warehoused men with lengthy prison sentences and no resources available to alter their conditions after their release (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) noted that an inmate's participation in the program was voluntary. Faculty, staff, and additional services required to safeguard and uphold the quality of the program were provided by Federal City College (Williams, 2017). Williams argued that both full-time staff and adjunct faculty worked hard to deliver excellent instruction and services for student-inmates because they were devoted and believed in this initiative's philosophy. According to Williams, some adjunct faculty taught at the Lorton Complex for at least twenty years which provided the program with much desired consistency and stability.

Williams (2017) noted that there were three phases of the program: institutional, bussing, and internship. Because the program was voluntary, the men were not required to participate in all three phases. If the inmates had any reservations or skepticism about the value or benefit of the program, they quickly evaporated shortly after the program began. Williams acknowledged that the men participating in the program recognized that some of their contemporaries were not prepared for the academic rigor and demands of college level courses. To address the issue of unprepared inmates, the men, who highlighted value explanation, took it upon themselves to eventually start a pre-college

program (Williams, 2017). It is important to note that students enrolled in the college program, who were at the advanced level, administered the pre-college program courses (Williams, 2017).

Williams (2017) reported that approximately 12 of the highest achieving students in the institutional phase were tutors for three non-credit courses; those courses were problem solving, developmental math, and writing. After completing one quarter in the pre-college program, those men were able to transition to the institutional phase and register for the college courses if their classmates had provided an encouraging recommendation (Williams, 2017). The bussing phase allowed students to attend classes at the Federal City College campus in Northwest Washington, DC.

Williams (2017) stated under firm rules, the bussing phase began in September 1970, whereby, 50 students from Lorton's Occoquan unit were transported to the main campus of Federal City College. To participate in the bussing phase, the students had to meet the following criteria: good behavior, the successful completion of institutional phase courses, and eligible for parole or educational release (Williams, 2017). The students were transferred while shackled. However, Williams revealed that the students were able to attend classes without their shackles so that they could blend in with the other students on campus.

Williams (2017) unveiled, in June 1973, the first 12 student participants of the college program graduated within four years from Federal City College and participated with the other college graduates during the on-campus graduation ceremony. In 1977, according to Williams, Federal City College merged with Washington Technical Institute and Miner Teacher's College to become the University of the District of Columbia. The

merger between the three academic institutions did not interfere or disrupt the operation of the Lorton Prison College Program. The 1977 University of the District of Columbia's commencement ceremony took place within the Lorton Complex for the first time since the program's inception with complete academic etiquette in effect (Williams, 2017).

In the early 1970s, inmates returning to their communities after a period of incarceration were faced with many challenges, especially employment opportunities. To assist the former inmates' adjustment to the community post-release, Project Start began in 1971 (Williams, 2017). Project Start was the name of the internship phase of the Lorton Prison College Program (Williams, 2017). According to Williams (2017), Project Start began with fifteen inmates positioned in real work sites within the community. Williams admitted that the intention of Project Start was to provide the inmates with an advantage on job opportunities after release. Williams conceded that some Project Start participants received a stipend.

Project Start was viewed as critical in preventing reoffending behavior (Williams, 2017). It was through Project Start where inmates were to receive needed positive community participation, time-management, work ethic, work experience, which contrasted with preceding unlawful behavior (Williams, 2017). It was believed that the Lorton Prison College Program was very effective in addressing the social problems of unemployment, drugs, and poverty (Williams, 2017). An essential goal of the program was reduction in recidivism among the men participating in this post-secondary educational experiment and by doing so it would instill a more optimistic self-concept within the men (Williams, 2017).



Due to the success of the Prison College Project, in 1972, the United States Congress decided to provide financial support for the program and made it a piece of the DC Appropriations Bill which resulted in it being a piece of DC's yearly budget (Williams, 2017). In 1973, Taylor (1974) reported 305 students were actively participating in all three program phases. Taylor further reported that the rate of reoffending was fewer than 15% for the project in general. Notwithstanding steady enrollment in the Lorton Prison College Program, in 1990, there were discussions about reducing aspects of the program to decrease spending and save money (Williams, 2017). Reports of the programs closure began in 1994 because of decreased financial support (Williams, 2017). Although the Lorton Prison College Program was viewed as a valuable resource for incarcerated men to assist with their reintegration, lack of financial backing led to the program's official closure in spring 1996 (William, 2017).

### **Summary**

Although most incarcerated individuals will return to the general-public, they appear to be the least valued and ignored as if they will never return. It is important for the general-public to realize and understand the services, support, and skills these former incarcerated individuals will need as they re-enter society. These services, support, and skills include but are not limited to education, vocational training, and job opportunities. Without these interventions among many more, the likelihood of reoffending increases significantly. Numerous correctional education programs occur inside the United States intended to support a decline in recidivism and assist formerly incarcerated individuals obtain gainful employment with livable wages. The key issues examined in the literature is the likely relationship between correctional education and employment opportunities,

achieving livable a wage, and reducing recidivism. The Lorton Prison College Program was in existence for over twenty years. It would be interesting to learn the impact it had on individuals leaving a period of incarceration returning to society. This study filled the gap in the literature regarding the perception and benefits of correctional education programs. The literature review prepared the reader for the research methodology to be examined in chapter 3. In chapter 3, I delivered a portrayal of the research methodology used to explore correctional education programs. Chapter 3 also uncovered insight into the research question, role of the researcher, selection of participants, data collection and analysis, and issues of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine correctional education programs. This qualitative study concentrated on the Lorton Prison College Program which was in existence from 1969-1996 (Williams, 2017). There has been an elimination or large reduction of educational and vocational educational programs offered to inmates within correctional facilities. Although some individuals are entering correctional facilities with a high school diploma or GED, most of those individuals do not possess either.

Therefore, there is a significant demand for incarcerated individuals to receive educational opportunities within the correctional facilities. As it was when the Lorton Project was created, lack of educational opportunities, crime, and drugs continue to plague communities today. Education has always been viewed as the most appropriate means to achieve success or the American dream. Consequently, imprisoned persons should be allowed to benefit from educational opportunities because they will be more employable and less likely to reoffend upon release.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Research Question**

There are two issues that shape the groundwork of this study as it relates to the Lorton Prison College Program. The first issue is the offender's view of the correctional education programs offered. The second issue is how an offender understands the correctional education program's effect on his reintegration into society and obtaining

employment with a livable wage. The primary research question used to guide this study was:

RQ: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs?

### **Concept of Study**

The concept of this research study was to identify five to seven African American men who participated in the Lorton Prison College Program, which was a correctional education program held at Lorton Prison. These individuals have first-hand knowledge of the program and can provide insight into the workings of the program. Furthermore, they will be able to explain their personal experiences with the program and provide the effect, if any, participation in the program had on their ability to obtain and maintain gainful employment. In this study, I examined correctional education programs and their impact on inner-city African American men.

### **Research Tradition**

The tradition chosen for this study was a qualitative research method. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described qualitative research methodology, generally, as being rooted in the methodological search of understanding the customs in which individuals' approach, experience, view, and see the world and make sense of their experiences in addition to the exact problem inside of it. Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as the means used to explore and understand the meaning groups and people attribute to a specific human or social phenomena. It was the contention of Creswell (2014) that numerous approaches can be used by researchers to collect data. Creswell (2014) identified qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods as the three primary strategies

researchers can use to gain a more profound understanding of social challenges. One of the following qualitative strategies can be used to conduct a research study:

- Phenomenology is used by researchers to highlight people's specific interpretations and experiences (Creswell, 2014).
- Grounded theory entails the concurrent gathering and examination of data, typically by using observations. Subsequently, from the data collected, researchers create a theory (Creswell, 2014).
- Case study is when the researcher explores a rich and thorough story regarding a person, program, event, organization, or campaign (Patton, 2015).
- Ethnography, which is closely linked to anthropology, is used by researchers to study people in their natural environment and describe their way of life (Patton, 2015).
- Narrative inquiry is the gathering of data from individuals telling their stories, which are often captured via interviews and the examination of archival data (Patton, 2015).

### **Design Rationale**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), research design is the general approach researchers use to link concepts and theories with research questions and methods used in collecting and analyzing data specific to their study. It is a methodological plan used by researchers to guide them through their study. A research design can be referred to as the complete approach carefully chosen by a researcher to fit in the differing mechanisms of the study in a rational way; in so doing, it ensures the researcher will effectively address the research phenomena.

Phenomenology was chosen for this study to examine the lived experiences of those men incarcerated in Lorton Prison and participated in the Lorton Prison College Program. The rationale for choosing this qualitative research approach is to provide the voice of former incarcerated individuals who represent an increasing marginalized population within our society. Yin (2016) claimed the researcher may consider conducting a qualitative study if they want to understand the way people survive in their real-world environments. Ravitch and Carl (2016) further claimed that phenomenological research is used by researchers interested in examining the lived experiences of individuals as they relate to a specific phenomenon, and the phenomenon is not necessarily bound by time and space.

The purpose of phenomenology, according to Patton (2015), is to gain a more profound understanding of the meaning and nature of one's everyday experiences. Patton also believed that researchers using the phenomenological approach are trying to understand the essence, structure, and meaning of the lived experience of this phenomenon for an individual or group. In this study, the qualitative approach gives the participants the opportunity to explain their lived experiences as participants in a correctional education program and the effect it had on their lives.

Although phenomenology was selected for this study, other qualitative strategies were considered and determined to be less effective in providing a deeper understanding of the experience of these men. For example, grounded theory is the collection and examination of data intended for researchers to create a theory. Since the intent of this study is not to create a theory, this qualitative approach is not appropriate. The case study approach is the examination of thorough data collection over a continual period. The case

study would have been more appropriate for this study if it took place during the operation of the Lorton Prison College Program. Therefore, this approach was not selected because this research is concerned with the lived experiences because of the phenomenon, not what occurred over time.

Like the case study approach, the ethnographical approach would have been more appropriate during the operation of the Lorton Prison College Program because it focuses on collecting data in a person's natural environment. During their period of incarceration, the Lorton Prison was the natural environment of those participating in the Lorton Prison College Program. The narrative inquiry approach seems to be the most related approach to phenomenology because data are collected from individuals telling their stories in an interview. However, archival data in addition to interviews are used in the data collection. Since there is limited archival data, this approach was not chosen.

### **Role of Researcher**

Patton (2015) contended that the researcher operates as an instrument who measures collected data throughout the study. Patton further contended the qualitative approach is personal in nature and the researcher chooses the qualitative approach to perform the study because the phenomenon being examined is personal. During data collection, Patton believed the researcher is responsible for collaborating and interacting with the participants of the research study. Successful qualitative researchers should have specific traits as an element of their personality to be effective in performing the study which include knowing their topic, asking good questions, listening, doing multiple tasks, caring about their data, and enduring (Yin, 2016).

According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013), qualitative researchers believe researcher involvement enhances the study. As the researcher, I performed the study with the assistance of my dissertation chair and committee member. My role as the researcher comprised of me being a good listener and note taker. I conducted telephone interviews with five research participants to collect data for the study. All study participants were asked the same questions and were given the time needed to answer the questions. I did not interrupt the participants or invoke any of my feelings or perceptions of correctional education programs during the interview. Some interviews took longer than others, but all participants answered all questions during the scheduled time for the interview.

As the researcher for this study, it was important to be somewhat of a subject matter expert on correctional education programs. Correctional education programs are not limited to college-level classes. Although most study participants were involved with the Lorton Prison College Program and participated in post-secondary educational programs, they could have asked questions about other forms of correctional education programs and the importance of conducting such a study at this time. Patton (2015) proposed that the credibility of study results is ultimately strengthened by the way the researcher participates in the fieldwork and examination as well as the researcher's aptitude for empathy, interpersonal competence, training, experience, skills, background, and cross-cultural compassion.

To obtain required data during interview sessions, good questions must be asked. It was important to avoid asking irrelevant or meaningless questions. Such questions would not provide any value or substantial information to the study. Avoiding asking irrelevant questions will honor the participants' time and may reduce the duration of each



interview. Yin (2016) argued that absent good questions, the researcher runs the risk of gathering too much unnecessary information while at the same time losing certain key data. The questions I asked were good, important, and relevant. Participants were asked open-ended questions to encourage in-depth, thoughtful, truthful, and non-speculative responses.

Being a good listener was one of the traits necessary in my role as a researcher. Yin (2016) suggested that good listening skills requires being observant. In my research study, I conducted structured telephone interviews with five participants. It was imperative to be a conscientious listener to solicit all information shared as data were being collected from the participants. As a good listener, the researcher can ask appropriate follow-up questions and minimize the number of times a participant is asked to repeat the answer given to the question. During the interviews, it was not necessary for me to ask any follow-up questions.

Researchers are often required to carry out multiple tasks simultaneously. This is evident during the interview process. While interviewing participants, I was an attentive listener while taking notes. I needed be aware of the environment in which the interview was taking place to ensure the comfortability of the participant. To ensure the comfortability of the participants, I allowed them to determine the day and time the interview was to take place. Since the interviews were held over the telephone, it was important to be an attentive listener to recognize any changes in the participants' temperament as well as monitor the time to make sure the interview did not take too long.

Care and concern of the data I collected was also necessary. It is imperative to protect all data collected during a research study. Safeguarding collected data is like

maintaining the chain of custody for evidence police officers collect during a criminal investigation. Guaranteeing the safety and security of data collected during a research study is essential because it maintains the reliability of the study. Yin (2016) proposed that neglecting to care about collected data may cause unintended harm to study participants in different ways such as communal, societal, and financial.

It can be argued that endurance is the most important role in conducting research. It is crucial for a researcher to endure to the very end despite frustration, fatigue, disappointments, and various challenges that may occur throughout the process. Qualitative researchers may have to confront many different challenges when working with human subjects. Researchers must be concerned with ethical dilemmas and not doing harm to study participants. The study viability and significance should be the motivation needed to provide a finish product.

### **Methodology**

Among researchers, there is no definitive answer or agreement as to what an adequate sample size is. For my phenomenological study, I used purposeful sampling and data saturation to address my sample size. Using the phenomenological approach for this qualitative research study, the population used was five African American men who participated in a correctional education program. I concentrated on finding study participants who participated in the Lorton Prison College Program. The qualitative research approach is characteristically comprised of a lesser number of research participants compared to the larger number of participants typically related to quantitative research. It is important to mention participants in a study embody a point of view. Croston (2014) noted the sample size in revealing phenomenological assessment is

standardized, purposeful, and has a typical number of participants ranging from six to 15. Hence, the traits of a standardized sample are determined by the subject matter.

Patton (2015) claimed that there are no existing rules regarding the sample size of selecting research participants in qualitative studies. Yin (2016) furthered the point by saying customary methods do not exist for researchers using the qualitative strategy as it relates to the sample size in selecting the number of study participants. In using human subjects, it is imperative for the researcher to abide by the laws and policies in conducting studies which involve human subjects.

It can be argued the sampling strategy, for one's study, is an essential element of the research design. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) proclaimed that random sampling is not frequently considered a worthwhile technique when selecting from a small participant pool, which in qualitative research studies is often the case. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as a non-random method that focuses on certain traits of the interested population which will best allow the researcher to answer the research questions best.

For this study, purposeful sampling was used because it allowed me to choose participants who possess certain traits to add awareness as it connected to the research questions. Using this type of sampling allowed me to gain several points of view for the study. Researchers found that purposeful sampling produces sizable quantities of profound and valuable explanations of the experience of someone who has lived throughout a phenomenon. Like other sampling strategies, there are shortcomings to purposeful sampling. Notwithstanding those shortcomings, Berg (2012) characterized those shortcomings as its frequent use allows researchers the capacity to examine the

lived experiences of small samples of individuals who have experienced the studied phenomenon and the absence of wide-ranging generalizability.

Purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on African American males over the age of 21 who participated in a correctional education program. It increased the likelihood of finding participants who were involved with a correctional education program because limiting the participants to the Lorton Prison College Program was too narrow. In my view, this sample size allowed me to collect a considerable amount of data necessary to adequately examine the phenomena being explored without producing too much data which would probably result from a larger number of participants and likely to hinder my fortitude to create meaningful awareness of the data gathered.

### **Research Participants**

I used a variety of approaches to find no less than five and no more than seven research participants to meet my study's requirement of being African American men over the age of 21 who participated in a correctional education program. My plan to find research participants comprised of locating individuals from the Washington, DC metropolitan area, which includes the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia. It was also my plan to find only former inmates who participated in the Lorton Prison College Program. Four out of the five African American men involved in this study participated in the Lorton Prison College Program during its 27 years of existence. Although there are shortcomings when using qualitative research through phenomenological methodology, it is nonetheless important to get the viewpoint of individuals who participated in correctional education programs, highlighting specifically those who participated in the Lorton Prison College Program.

A recruitment flyer was created to find research participants. With permission from Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), Mayor's Office of Returning Citizens Affairs (MORCA), and radio host Roach Brown for *Crossroads* radio show on WPFW 89.3 FM in Washington, DC, I used these venues for recruitment using the recruitment flyer as directed by them. The flyer had all essential information about the study which included an introduction of myself such as my name, and the purpose of the study is for me as a doctoral student pursuing the Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy and Administration degree at Walden University and this research study fulfills part of the requirements needed to obtain the degree. It also included the name of the study, *Examining Correctional Education Programs: The Lorton Prison College Program*, along with the requirements to participate in the study such as African American men over the age of 21 who participated in a correctional education program. The flyer informed potential participants that no compensation will be given to those who agree to participate and informed them that it will be a telephone interview.

Although no compensation was given, the flyer included the importance of the study as a means of promoting social change and as a benefit for the community at-large. The flyer also included my contact information for those interested in participating in the study. During our telephone conversation, the perspective participants were informed of the number of participants I was seeking, the approximate time of the interview (45 minutes) and the number of questions (approximately 10) that would be asked and each interview would be recorded, and all participants would remain anonymous, by assigning each participant an alias for the purpose of the study. If the perspective participants were still interested in participating, I scheduled the interview. If I had secured seven

interviews, I would have informed any other interested parties that I had reached the number of participants needed for the study and thank them for their interest.

### **Instrumentation**

In my role as researcher, I employed the human observer model. As such, using qualitative research through phenomenological methodology, I was the primary instrument used throughout the study. However, the telephone was used to carry out the interviews and all interviews were audio-recorded. The research tool is the means for gathering evidence (Yin, 2016). During the interviews, I asked questions, listened attentively to take precise notes and to detect in change in the demeanor of participants. There were five telephone interviews. Again, an explanation of the purpose of the study and potential benefits of the study were shared with the participants before each interview began. All questions were open-ended. There was a total of 14 questions and all participants were asked the same questions. Although all questions were asked verbally, requiring a verbal response, all participants were provided most of the questions on the recruitment flyer. Even though I took notes during the interviews, all interviews were audio taped. Each audio tape was transcribed professionally, and the participants were informed of this. To conduct an effective qualitative research study, Yin (2016) said the researcher should employ certain interview techniques such as maintaining rapport, staying impartial, and allow the participant to speak without interruptions.

In qualitative studies, researchers look for common themes which often leads to data saturation. For this study, thematic analysis was used to explain my results. In doing so, I looked for themes, consistencies, commonalities, and patterns. There is more than one way to analyze the data collected in qualitative research. The use of coding is one

method used to analyze qualitative data. Ravitch and Carl (2016) said codes can likewise embody rational concepts. According to Saldana (2016), there are different ways to code qualitative data. The source of the data, albeit inductive or deductive, determines the type of coding to be used by the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is important to note that coding is not an exact science; it is mainly the act of interpretation (Saldana, 2016). For this study, NVivo was the software used for coding. Although thematic analysis is a different style, it does not focus only on one factor. As an alternative, thematic analysis assembles all associated variables and establishes strengths and vulnerabilities concerning the responses, gestures, and attitudes of the study participants. Thematic analysis is not connected to one theory; it goes to the extent of delivering weaknesses and evaluations of social issues such as ethnicity, race, class, and socio-economic status.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can be used to explain the techniques and tactics that qualitative researchers apply to evaluate the thoroughness of qualitative studies. In qualitative research, it is important for researchers to ensure the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of their research study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) claimed that trustworthiness is a term often used as an alternative to rigor and quality. Ravitch and Carl maintained that trustworthiness is frequently utilized and recalls the significance of guaranteeing integrity and consistency in qualitative research. To ensure the quality of qualitative research, it is imperative for the researchers to understand that their research must be able to withstand all scrutiny.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the quality of one's research is determined by the rigor of the study. Ravitch and Carl suggested that the validity of a qualitative

study influences the quality of the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described validity as the means by which researchers will be able to confirm that their results are true to the experiences of the participants. Ravitch and Carl claimed designing and performing thorough and compelling qualitative studies necessitates certain skills and knowledge. Yin (2016) said transferability freely acknowledges the uniqueness of the restricted conditions in an individualized qualitative study. Yin furthered the point by saying transferability encompasses a slight claim that may well ensue a reasonable interpretation.

### **Credibility**

In my study, credibility was formed through the identification of main themes derived from the answers given to each interview question by the research study participants. If the identified themes are consistent throughout from most study participants, it can be asserted that this will likely enhance validity and accuracy to the findings. Ali and Yusof (2012) expressed the objective of researchers is to lessen bias and inaccuracies in a research study. Telephone interviews were conducted over a period of two months. All participants were given a pseudonym and number for validation and confidentiality.

### **Dependability**

According to Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), dependability occurs when the decision of the current researcher can be followed by others. In my study, dependability will be established by using meticulous facts throughout the study concerning audio recordings and written transcripts of the participants responses. The goal of triangulation is to pursue no less than three approaches substantiating or verifying a fragment of



information, technique, or conclusion (Yin, 2016). The triangulation for this study is shown in a table identifying the themes which surfaced during the study.

### **Conformability**

According to White, Oelke, and Friesen (2012), the recommended four step process of generate an audit trail, internal audit, external audit, and a final report will be used to establish conformability of the study results. The research data was gathered through interviews which aligned with proto-themes and was thoroughly reviewed to safeguard accuracy among the connections and the results.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to analyze the lived experiences of five African American men who participated in a correctional education program. The motivation of the study was to discover the impact of correctional education programs on formerly incarcerated African American men as it relates to employment and securing a livable wage. In this chapter, I presented and described the research design and rationale as well as the methodology for this qualitative study. I spoke to the role of the researcher and the recruitment of research participants. I addressed transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformability considerations correlating to trustworthiness.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required before any research could be conducted. The IRB outlined the proper procedures required in conducting research. I completed the IRB process. Once I received IRB approval, I began recruiting study participants. The participants of the study were formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in correctional education programs. Four participants took

part in the Lorton Prison College Program. Participation in this study was voluntary and of free will. Each participant was treated with respect and dignity. Pseudonyms were given to each participant to keep their identity anonymous. Each participant was referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. to prevent the revelation of the real identity of the participants. All data collected was recorded on an audio tape and the transcription of the recorded interviews will be stored on a flash drive that will not contain any other information.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to assess correctional education programs through the lived experiences of five African American men. The goal of this study was to determine any influences correctional education programs had on the lives of the participants as they reintegrated into society. The primary research question for this phenomenological study was: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs? This chapter is divided into the following seven sections: setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence & trustworthiness, results, and the summary.

### **Setting**

All five study participants agreed to be interviewed via telephone. Therefore, all interviews were conducted over the telephone and comprised of the participants and me. The interviews were conducted from November 30, 2020 to January 31, 2021. All interviews were audio-recorded, and all participants consented to being recorded.

### **Demographics**

- Participant 1: 41 years of age, African American man, 23 years of incarceration
- Participant 2: 43 years of age, African American man, 15 years of incarceration
- Participant 3: 39 years of age, African American man, 2.5 years of incarceration

- Participant 4: 42 years of age, African American man, 25 years of incarceration
- Participant 5: 60 years of age, African American man, 25 years of incarceration

It is important to note all participants did not serve their entire sentence. Three of the participants were sentenced to life and one participant was sentenced to 75 years. Due to various reasons, they all were granted an early release. The average age of the participants was 45 years. The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be very challenging in completing the interviews. Many jurisdictions were under a stay-at-home order and/or required to abide by the Center for Disease Control social distancing guidelines. As a result, the interviews were conducted via telephone instead of face-to-face.

### **Data Collection**

There was a total of eight individuals who responded to the flyer to participate in the research study. Of the eight individuals, one did not meet the criteria to participate and one did not provide written consent to participate. Saturation was reached after the completion of the fifth interview. As a result, the study comprised of five participants. All participants were interviewed and asked the same questions in the same order. Data were collected from each study participant with the answers given after each question as they were being recorded. I conducted the interviews using my cellular telephone while sitting in my home office. I also took written notes during the interview. There was no one in the home with me while the interviews were taking place because I live alone and did not have any visitors. Each interview took less than 60 minutes.

Prior to each recording, I reassured each participant their participation was anonymous, and I would not use their names or any identifying information about them during the interviews. Each participant was informed when the recording was about to begin. After each interview, I informed each participant the recording device was turned off and asked if there were any questions. The only question asked by more than one participant was where I was in the PhD process. All participants wished me well and were glad they were able to help. One participant mentioned being incarcerated when the Pell grant was available and when the Pell grant was no longer available to incarcerated individuals. He was pleased to hear someone was researching and addressing correctional education programs because he finds it to be a valuable opportunity for incarcerated individuals. I thanked each of them for their time and sharing their personal stories with me.

### **Data Analysis**

Software packages are valuable in helping researchers generate a precise image of the data and deliver an assessment of the data analysis process. Welsh (2002) acknowledged the popularity of the NVivo software and mentioned it is easy to use, which is essential. With the many challenges involved in a research study, researchers do not need the pressure of understanding complicated software. I used NVivo to aid in the analysis of the data gathered during the interviews. NVivo permitted files to be imported directly from Microsoft Word and coded files effortlessly on the monitor.

During the interviews, I asked each study participant the same 14 questions (see Appendix A for interview questions). Using thematic coding, I was able to categorize commonalities. The themes linked to the primary research question which surfaced

during data analysis were: (a) education, (b) motivation, (c) supportive relationships, and (d) employment. I will further discuss each of these themes in the results section of this chapter.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

The first step in establishing credibility was obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB. All study participants were formerly incarcerated individuals and were not under any form of court supervision. To validate the quality of this research, saturation and member checking were used. Saturation was reached after completing five interviews, which was within the range of five to seven participants I intended to interview. At the point where I ceased to continue interviews, responses had become unnecessary and further data collection seemed unwarranted. I conducted member checks with each participant allowing each of them to clarify any misunderstanding I may have made about their assertions as elaborate on their responses. In determining credibility, the member checking technique is frequently used in qualitative studies to minimize or exclude researcher bias during data collection.

#### **Dependability**

Dependability was delivered all through the comprehensive process of this research study. The commonly used NVivo software was used to assist in the transcription and analysis of the data collected. Data triangulation was also used to assist in safeguarding dependability of my findings. The feedback from my dissertation committee aided in recruitment and selection of study participants. The IRB process made sure the interview questions were clear and understandable. Participants were

provided the consent form, along with some interview questions, apprising them of the study objective. Participants were not restricted to specific days of the week or certain times of the day to complete the interviews.

### **Confirmability**

It was important to authenticate my research findings based on the collection and analysis of data to confirm what was revealed. Confirmability was achieved by using and presenting only data offered by the participants. The conclusions are only derived from that same data. In doing so, the conclusions were free of any biases. While collecting data, in addition to using an audio recording device, I kept precise notes of the procedure to precisely deliver my findings.

### **Results**

This qualitative phenomenological study consisted of one primary research question. The primary question asked was: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs? The study participants appeared to be forthcoming in answering the interview questions. They all mentioned feeling comfortable in telling their stories. All study participants were incarcerated in multiple prisons during their period of incarceration. All participants involved themselves in at least one correctional education program in each prison where they were incarcerated. Four key themes surfaced from the data collected to answer the question. The four key themes were: (a) education, (b) motivation, (c) supportive relationships, (d) employment. Table 1, provided below, lists, and describes these themes.

**Table 1.** *Study Themes and Descriptions Pertaining to the Research Question*

Factor contributing to re-entry success	Description
Theme 1: Education	Enhances the success of re-entry and the likelihood of an African American man's ability to obtain and maintain employment.
Theme 2: Motivation	An account of the motivators that aided in sustaining the fortitude and concentration needed to thrive.
Theme 3: Supportive Relationships	Consists of friendships and familial connections which frequently governs the amount and type of assistance men receive following release.
Theme 4: Employment	The principal task essential for the success of re-entry as it permits men to deliver for themselves and their families.

### **Factors Contributing to Re-entry Success**

The following themes surfaced pertaining to the research question, which examined correctional education programs through the lived experiences of five African American men and their impact on their successful reintegration back in the community: education, motivation, supportive relationships, and employment. The participants explained how these four themes inspired their success when returning to society following incarceration.

#### **Theme 1: Education**

Education is viewed as a key contributor to the success of re-entry. For many, education is believed to increase a formerly incarcerated individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment. All study participants experienced their first period of incarceration at a young age. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 received and began serving their first long prison sentence at a young age, in their mid to late teenage years. Participant 3



served his prison sentence during his mid to late twenties. All participants mentioned not valuing or appreciating education until they were incarcerated.

Participant 1 participated in online and correspondence courses. He received an associate of science degree in early childhood education during his period of incarceration. Participant 2 took college courses for credit while incarcerated. After he was released, he transferred those credits to a community college and earned his associate of applied science degree in business. He is now working on his bachelor's degree in business administration and is scheduled to graduate this year. Participant 3 took courses toward his commercial driver's license while incarcerated. He is now working on his associate of arts degree at a community college. Participant 4 earned his GED while incarcerated. He participated in many certificate programs and earned several certificates. He also took college courses while incarcerated. Participant 5 earned his GED and associate of arts degree while incarcerated. After his incarceration, he went on to earn his Bachelor of Arts degree in criminal justice and Master of Arts degree in special education. All participants are delighted with their accomplishments and are pleased with the level of education obtained. They all have a sense of satisfaction as a result.

## **Theme 2: Motivation**

In general, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards help motivate us to either do better or stay on our current academic or career path. For many, the reward must be intrinsic. Determination and personal motivators are necessary for formerly incarcerated individuals to have a successful re-entry. All participants said they were determined to do better and did not want to return to prison. They all viewed education as the first step in the process of not returning to prison and concentrated on averting from criminal activity.

Participant 1 said greater knowledge increases job opportunities and decreases criminal activity involvement. Participant 2 said he took advantage of all opportunities available to him and created a plan of action so that he would not return to prison. Participant 3 said knowledge is a powerful tool against criminal activity. He decided to give back to the community by starting a non-profit to divert youths from engaging in criminal activity. Participant 4 said being productive is a motivator. Participant 5 said receiving the GED was his biggest motivator. When he entered prison, he could not read or write and did not know he had a learning disability. He grew up believing in God, and his faith in God strengthened while incarcerated. He did not want to reoffend, so he kept pursuing education and maintained his strength in God.

### **Theme 3: Supportive Relationships**

Participants said having supportive family was critical during their period of incarceration. Participants discussed the role family played in their re-entry. Since most of them were incarcerated as teenagers, they thought they had let their families down, but their families stayed by their side and supported them during their incarceration and reintegration back into society. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 were serving federal prison sentences. During their incarceration, they were transferred to numerous prisons. They said the one thing consistent was family. Participant 3 was incarcerated in a facility somewhat close to his family, which he found tremendously helpful.

### **Theme 4: Employment**

It is important to obtain and maintain employment as soon as possible upon release from incarceration. For most men, it is critical to be able to take care of yourself and earning an income is necessary to do that. Participants acknowledged the ability to

find a job can be hindered by a felony conviction. Four of the five participants said they were able to find a job almost immediately upon release. Participant 1 obtained employment as a youth mentor within two weeks after his release. Within three months, he was promoted to lead mentor. A friend facilitated the job opportunity for him, and his associate degree helped because he is working in his field of study. Participant 2 said it took almost a year to find employment. He participated in a program geared toward individuals re-entering or those having difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment. He has been employed with the same organization for over six years as a program assistant site director. Participant 3 said it took 1 ½ months to secure employment. He is working for a telecommunication company owned by his father. Participant 4 had a job prepared for him upon release. He started within weeks upon his release. He is a facility engineer at a church. Participant 5 said his first job upon release was washing cars with his uncle. He has worked numerous jobs to put himself throughout undergraduate and graduate school. He now owns a non-profit organization to divert youths from the criminal justice system.

### **Participants' Responses to Interview Questions**

Participants responses to question "Where were you incarcerated?" Participant 1 said he was incarcerated throughout the United States. He said he was in 10-12 different places during his 23-year period of incarceration. He was last detained in DC Jail prior to his re-entry. Participant 2 said he was incarcerated in Lorton Prison in Lorton, VA, and Fairton Correctional Institution in New Jersey. Participant 3 said he was incarcerated in Rivers Correctional Institution in North Carolina and was last detained in DC Jail prior to his re-entry. Participant 4 said he was incarcerated in Lorton Prison in Lorton, VA, Red

Onion Prison in Virginia, and Leavenworth Prison in Kansas. He said he was also incarcerated in New Jersey, Ohio, Arizona, and New Mexico. Participant 5 said he was incarcerated in Lorton Prison, Maryland Prison System, Lewisburg Prison in Pennsylvania, and different prisons within the United States Penitentiary System.

Participants responses to question “When were you incarcerated?” Participant 1 was incarcerated 1997-2020. Participant 2 was incarcerated 1998-2013. Participant 3 was incarcerated 2006-2009. Participant 4 was incarcerated 1994-2019. Participant 5 was incarcerated 1971-1996.

Participants responses to question “What type of correctional education programs were offered where you were incarcerated?” Participant 1 reported online and correspondent courses while in prison. During his time in DC Jail credit courses were provided by Georgetown University through the Prison Scholars Program. Participant 2 reported the Lorton Prison College Program, GED programs, and college courses through Cumberland Community College in Fairton Correctional Facility. Participant 3 reported college courses in Rivers Correctional Institution and certification courses at DC Jail. Participant 4 reported GED programs, certificate programs, Lorton Prison College Program, and college courses for credit from Allenwood College in New Jersey. Participant 5 reported being able to take college courses from Bloomberg State College in Pennsylvania and Essex County College in New Jersey while in federal prisons. While in the Maryland system, he was able to take college courses offered by Coppin State University, and Morgan State University.

Participants responses to question “Were you permitted to participate in more than one program?” All participants said yes, and all participants participated in more than one program.

Participants responses to question “How was the program designed?” Participant 1 said the options in prison were online and correspondence course offerings. While he was incarcerated in the DC Jail, the only option available was face-to-face instruction. Participant 2 said all programs offered, regardless of prison, were face-to-face instruction. Participant 3 said all programs were face-to-face. Participant 4 said all programs were face-to-face. Participant 5 said all programs were face-to-face. In the face-to-face environment, professors from neighboring community colleges or universities came into the correctional facility and held classes. All participants who participated in college courses received college credit.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to examine correctional education programs through the lived experiences of five to seven African American men. One main research question steered this research study, which was: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants’ perceptions of correctional education programs? The data was collected via audio recorded telephone interviews. The qualitative software program, NVivo, was used to aid in scrutinizing the data gathered from the completed interviews. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), NVivo provides the qualitative researcher the capability to gather, coordinate, sort, code, and scrutinize content acquired from various sources including

interviews. Four themes surfaced from the responses to the interview questions, which were education, motivation, supportive relationships, and employment.

Education was the first theme to surface in my study. All participants valued education and believed education was vital to changing their lives and make better decisions. All participants said they were better equipped to reintegrate because of the correctional education program in which they participated.

Motivation was the second theme to surface in my study. Because all participants were first incarcerated at a young age, they all said they were motivated to change their lives and not return to prison.

Supportive relationships were the third theme to surface in my study. All participants said it was important to have supportive relationships during their incarceration. Four of the five participants were transferred to multiple prisons during their incarceration. However, all the participants served a period of incarceration far away from their families which prevented familial visits. Therefore, the ability to maintain contact via telephone calls and letters was essential to their mental well-being and making better decisions in and out of prison.

Employment was the fourth theme to surface in my study. Four of the five participants secured employment almost immediately upon release. Although it took one participant almost a year to secure employment, all participants contributed their ability to obtain employment to family, friends, and community support. All participants cited being employed is the first step in making better decisions, avoiding criminal activity, and successfully reintegrating back into society. Four of the five participants are still employed with the same company who employed them upon their release. Two of the

participants have created their own non-profit organizations. One of the participants is solely employed with his non-profit organization.

In this chapter, I identified the setting, demographics, techniques used to collect the data, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and the summary. In chapter 5, I identified an explanation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations for future research, social change implications, and the conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to assess correctional education programs through the lived experiences of a sample of five to seven African American men over the age of 21. A few agencies were used to recruit research participants for the study. The participant pool was limited to African American men over the age of 21 who served a prison sentence and participated in a correctional education program. The goal of this study is to determine any influences correctional education programs had on the lives of the participants as they reintegrated into society. The primary research question for this phenomenological study was: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs? To answer the research question, I conducted telephone interviews with five African American men over the age of 30. Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted an average of 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted November 30, 2020 through January 31, 2021.

This phenomenological study was carried out to fill the gap within contemporary literature on correctional education program. Over the years, the philosophy surrounding incarcerated individuals fluctuated between rehabilitation and punishment. Correctional education programs were prominent throughout the United States when the focus was rehabilitating incarcerated individuals. Hence, there were numerous studies conducted to determine the effectiveness of correctional education programs, with the emphasis being on vocational and adult education programs. There were some studies on post-secondary correctional education programs.



When post-secondary education correctional education programs were a point of emphasis, incarcerated individuals were able to receive the Pell grant to fund their post-secondary education. When society began to call for tough punishment for convicted individuals, the “get tough” movement began, budget cuts ensued, and the focus changed from rehabilitation to punishment. This resulted in the demise of many correctional education programs, especially at the post-secondary level. Over the last couple of decades, an increased understanding that most incarcerated individuals will return to society shifted the focus to the rehabilitation approach. As a result, post-secondary correctional education programs have been re-emerging across the United States. The end of this research study provided vital feedback rooted in qualitative data to be explored, investigated, and assessed by officials or legislators responsible for making policies to address correctional education programs efficiently and successfully.

Patton (2015) said the objective of qualitative analysis is to generate intelligence of the qualitative data gathered by answering the primary questions surrounding the research study, uncovering patterns, discovering themes, and presenting relevant notable results. NVivo was used to assist me in analyzing the data gathered during the audio-recorded interviews I performed. Rudestam and Newton (2015) stated NVivo allows qualitative researchers the capacity to gather, arrange, sort, code, and evaluate content acquired from various sources as well as interviews. The following four themes emerged from the responses to the interview questions: (1) education, (2) motivation, (3) supportive relationships, and (4) employment.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

To ascertain the perception of correctional education programs through the lived experiences of former incarcerated individuals, I interviewed five African American men over the age of 30. Although every study participant agreed correctional education programs are important and essential to re-entry, they also agreed these education programs were not solely responsible for their positive and successful reintegration. Hence, the four themes emerged as factors contributing to re-entry success. Polarities of democracy is the theoretical framework used in this qualitative study. The aim of polarities of democracy is to be a unifying model to steer, evaluate, and propose social change endeavors meant to form just, viable, and wholesome communities within a self-governing society (Benet, 2013).

The single research question used to steer this study is: What are former Lorton Prison College Program African American male participants' perceptions of correctional education programs? Due to budget cuts and public outcry against the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals over the years, there has been a decline in correctional education programs offered to inmates. Some researchers have linked a decrease in recidivism to correctional education programs. Therefore, I wanted to gain a better understanding of correctional education programs from individuals who participated in those type of programs. As mentioned earlier, the following four themes surfaced during the analysis of the data gathered from the participant interviews.

### **Theme 1: Education**

Vacca (2004) argued most formerly incarcerated individuals are out of work because of their deficiency in job readiness skills and education. Every participant

mentioned being under prepared educationally when they entered prison. They said education was not limited to the lack of their formal education but also not knowing about themselves and the limitation they placed on themselves by getting involved in criminal activities. It can be argued there is a strong correlation between education and employment. More importantly, Pryor and Thompkins (2013) asserted ex-offenders are in danger of reoffending if they are unable to benefit from the attainment of skills and education.

Although many believe knowledge is power, many incarcerated individuals are deficient in formal education. Four out of the five participants earned college credits while incarcerated, with two of them earning an associate degree while incarcerated. Since their release, one participant earned his associate degree and is now pursuing a bachelor's degree; one has earned a master's degree. The one participant who did not receive college credits while incarcerated participated in other correctional education programs. However, he is currently pursuing an associate degree. None of the participants credited their post-secondary education for obtaining employment upon release. They primarily credited their motivation not to return to prison and supportive relationships as key in finding employment.

## **Theme 2: Motivation**

From the first day of their prison sentence, all participants said they were motivated not to return after their release. It is important to keep in mind four out of the five participants began their prison sentence as teenagers. All five participants said they were determined to be productive and successful after reintegration into society.

According to Flake et al. (2015), motivation to accomplish an objective is governed by

the principles one possesses, but the expense tied to striving to accomplish an objective must not be larger than the principles of accomplishing the objective. Study participants expressed the value of freedom and everything that arises from such freedom. The degree of willpower one maintains to accomplish an objective is influenced by the motivator's endurance.

### **Theme 3: Supportive Relationships**

It is important to note supportive relationships can play a pivotal role in the re-entry of a formerly incarcerated individual. According to the study participants, supportive relationships, primarily family relationships, allowed them to survive their period of incarceration mentally and socially. Family members provided emotional support which aided in relieving anxiety and feelings of loneliness while incarcerated. Life behind bars sometimes felt more bearable for study participants because of the financial support received which allowed them to purchase needed items from the commissary. Every study participant said supportive relationships played a huge role in their ability to successfully reintegrate. They all claimed it was supportive relationships that led to their ability to obtain employment upon release.

### **Theme 4: Employment**

One of the first objectives of a formerly incarcerated individual is to obtain and maintain employment. Although obtaining employment is celebrated once achieved, it is arguably the most stressful part of the reintegration process. It is stressful for the formerly incarcerated individual and their family members because their ability to remain in the community and avoid criminal activity is strongly connected to their ability to obtain employment. Many formerly incarcerated individuals return to the community on

probation. They are told to get a job and not necessarily provided resources or services to assist them in finding a job. None of the participants in my study returned to the community on probation. With the assistance of family and friends, four out of the five participants were able to obtain employment within 30 days of their release. The one participant who took longer to obtain employment used community resources and one resource designed to assist disadvantaged and under-represented communities.

In some jurisdictions, formerly incarcerated individuals can obtain temporary or seasonal employment in construction or day laborer positions. The ability to obtain and maintain permanent full-time employment is linked to re-entry success and a reduction in overall recidivism. The attraction to criminal activity and resorting to illegal means to earn money are diminished when formerly incarcerated individuals are employed and can take care of themselves and their families. Employment and family responsibilities can serve as a distraction from criminal activity. When formerly incarcerated individuals obtain employment, it increases their self-confidence and self-worth. It allows them to financially depend on themselves to fund the cost of life necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. It is important for these individuals to obtain meaningful employment with a livable wage.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The aim of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine correctional education programs through the lens of formerly incarcerated African American men who participated in such programs during their period of incarceration. One limitation is the number of existing qualitative studies on correctional education programs. Most studies have focused on vocational and adult basic education programs within prisons.

However, there is a lack of qualitative studies, especially in recent years, focusing on post-secondary education programs. My study focused on correctional post-secondary education programs.

Purposeful sampling was the sampling strategy employed to select participants. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), purposeful sampling is described as the main method of sampling used in qualitative research, and it requires persons selected purposefully to take part in a research study for explicit reasons stemming from the fundamental hypotheses and frameworks of the research questions. The goal was to interview five to seven participants. There was a total of 10 men interested in participating in the study. Two out of the 10 men did not meet the criteria to participate in the study. Out of the remaining eight potential participants, only five of the men submitted their written consent to participate in the study. Although there is no universal consensus on the sample size for qualitative research, the number of participants for this study was a limitation. Yet, data saturation was achieved with the five participants, resulting in the four themes described. Data saturation is defined as the moment in time, during data collection, the researcher can no longer identify new themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a huge limitation. COVID-19 negatively impacted my ability to recruit participants and conduct the interviews. When I received IRB approval which permitted me to begin recruiting participants, there were over 200,000 deaths due to COVID-19 in the United States. Stay at home orders, social distancing guidelines, and concerns of contracting and spreading the virus affected the study. In my opinion, COVID-19 contributed to the small number of study participants. Recruitment

efforts were limited, and face-to-face interviews were not an option. Recruitment efforts were limited because I was not able to use various methods to reach out to the agencies I planned to use for recruitment. I was limited to telephone calls and emails to various point of contacts for the agencies, which was more time consuming than originally anticipated. Participants and I were working from home, which impacted scheduling the interviews. Zoom meetings taking place during the day and evening along with family responsibilities impeded progress in scheduling interviews. All interviews were conducted over the telephone. This study does not present any known limitations on the issue of trustworthiness. As outlined in Chapter 4, the techniques employed to safeguard trustworthiness were followed.

### **Recommendations**

With the overall rise in female offenders, especially as it relates to more serious offenses resulting in prison sentences, the first recommendation is to examine correctional education programs through the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women. One may take it a step further by conducting a comparative analysis study between men and women. In many areas of the criminal justice system, the female population is often less studied. Despite its relevancy, examining the perceptions of formerly incarcerated women is mostly missing from contemporary research literature. Increasing their voice in qualitative studies is key to changing the ideology of the “male as normal” attitude which has generally been applied to the treatment of female offenders. Treatment, services, and resources provided to women have always been decided based on studies of male offenders. This is the 21st century, and it is time to adopt and implement a more gender-specific attitude.

Even though this research study achieved saturation with five participants, I recommend conducting a study with a sample size of 10-14 instead of five to seven participants. In this study, purposeful sampling was used, focusing on African American men and the Lorton Prison College Program. The next study should use random sampling seeking individuals over the age of 21 years who participated in a post-secondary correctional education program. This new criterion may yield different ethnic and cultural groups as well as differences in gender for a more diverse participant pool.

### **Implications**

Positive social change can be accomplished in several ways. An organization, group, or individual can be a mechanism for positive social change. Positive social change can be identified by societal relationships, a shift inside a social structure, or change to society at large. The findings of this study have the potential to powerfully contribute to positive social change. Many consequences exist for people with criminal records, prisons and jails that offer correctional education programs, and ex-offenders returning to the community. The study results will get interested parties involved in more meaningful correctional strategies and reintegration efforts to meet the needs of formerly incarcerated African American men. Although the study participants did not see a direct correlation between correctional education and re-entry, the likelihood of effective society reintegration can be enhanced with participating in a correctional education program (Redcross et al., 2010). Many formerly incarcerated individuals return to society ashamed, with low self-esteem and low self-worth because of the degradation felt during their incarceration.



The primary goal of incarceration should be rehabilitation because most incarcerated individuals will return to society. If the focus is rehabilitation, ex-offenders will return to society equipped with education, skills, training, and a new and different attitude to abstain from criminal activity and become productive members of society. In addition to gaining and improving knowledge in a correctional education program, ex-offenders also learn the benefits of commitment, dependability, responsibility, resiliency, and endurance. These are traits needed to be successful in the workplace and life in general.

By re-counting correctional education programs through the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals, this study offered awareness for prison and jail administrators who offer such programs. Prison and jail administrators and policymakers should consider, examine, and evaluate this scholarly research study for correctional education program implementation or to scrutinize its current educational programs. The question they should ask is does the cost and benefits of implementing such programs outweigh the cost of recidivism and increased crime. Prison administrators should collaborate with community colleges to provide best correctional education programs to prepare inmates for reintegration. If the result of this study's findings is a shift in guidelines and programs utilized for the rehabilitation of offenders, the possible effect would be lowered recidivism.

### **Conclusion**

This phenomenological qualitative study offered the viewpoint of five formerly incarcerated African American men on correctional education programs. The five study participants are over the age of 30 and served at least 2.5 years in prison. Four out of the

five participants served more than 10 years in prison. Even though the participants were not asked the nature of their crime, a couple of the participants mentioned they had committed drug related offenses. Although they were not asked about reoffending, they all said they have maintained steady employment after their release. Each of them served a portion of their sentence in more than one prison. Four out of the five participants served a portion of their sentence in Lorton Prison.

The participants come from various backgrounds and life experiences. Yet, they have a similar worldview because of the early age in which they were incarcerated, spending most of their young adulthood behind bars. Two of the participants were juvenile lifers and one participant was sentenced to 75 years. Despite not expecting life outside of prison, they began preparing for a life outside by participating in correctional education programs and improving their skills while incarcerated. They all maintained supportive relationships during their incarceration which proved valuable when they returned to society.

Too often, within the criminal justice system, the findings of studies on males are ascribed to females. It is important not to generalize the results of this study to females. More research on female offenders is needed. This study confirms the need of comparable research on the re-entry of female offenders. The results of this study may inspire correctional education programs to offer essential backing for effective societal reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals.

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### Appendix: Interview Questions

Where were you incarcerated?

When were you incarcerated?

What type of correctional education programs were offered where you were incarcerated?

Were you permitted to participate in more than one program?

In which program(s) did you participate?

How was the program designed?

Did you complete the program(s)?

What motivated you to participate in the program?

What did you find to be beneficial about the program?

What did you find to be challenging about the program?

After release, how were you able to reintegrate/adjust to the community?

How did the correctional education program assist you with reintegration?

After release, how long did it take you to obtain employment?

What type(s) of employment were you able to obtain?