

2021

A Qualitative Study of Parolee Perceptions of Penal Educational Program

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Deborah D. Johnson

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

A Qualitative Study of Parolee Perceptions of Penal Educational Program

by

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MA, Capella University, 2011

BA, University of Texas, Arlington, 2004

BS, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1982

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

An estimated 30% of the incarcerated population does not participate in the educational programs offered within the target state penal education system. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of parolees towards the prison's education system and the problem of low participation by using a qualitative approach and conceptual framework based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Three research questions explored parolee perceptions toward barriers for enrollment and participation in education programming during incarceration, strategies and supports that could have increased self-confidence and motivation to participate in the programs, and descriptions of internalized experiences. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with 7 parolees whose perceptions were analyzed using an open coding process to derive categories, themes, and meanings. Findings included: threats of receiving major cases and losing good time, the need for other coursework and post-secondary classes besides mandatory classes, disqualified due to 6 months or less of sentence left to serve, advanced age, hinderances from staff, unqualified instructors, frequent instructor absenteeism, nepotism, and correctional staff doubling as teaching staff. Recommendations included forming an Integrated Offender Management team, professional training for staff, policy changes for an improved curriculum, changes in hiring education instructor, and monitoring staff for inappropriate behaviors. This qualitative exploratory study has the potential to promote positive social change through policy changes resulting in increased parolee confidence, motivation, and preparedness for re-entry into society as well as decreases in recidivism, reoffending, and rearrests. The resulting project was a white paper that will disseminate the findings to the stakeholders.

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Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to my mother, Margaret Jean Johnson, who believed in me when I did not believe in myself, and inflamed the desire for life-long learning. Thank you, Mom. I still miss you. This degree is for you.

Acknowledgments

Only God knows what a journey this has been thus far. Thank you Dr. Kass Claggett, Dr. Maureen Ellis, and Dr. Patricia Anderson because you all knew I could complete this work and helped me to figure it out.

Thank you to my younger children, Sabian, Atari, Imani, and Isaiah for being quiet when I had to work and for your patience when I clearly had none. Thank you to my older children, Jasmaine and Jefferson, for supporting this great effort. Thank you for my aunt, Carol, who has believed in me since I first started college in 1978 and was so proud when I graduated with my first BS that she took my class ring for herself. Thank you all for your love and support.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	3
Rationale	6
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level	6
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Significance of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Review of the Literature	13
Conceptual Framework.....	13
Review of the Broader Problem.....	16
How Self-efficacy Affects Goal Setting	17
The Prison Education System and Programs	18
On-line Learning in the Penal System	21
Implications.....	23
Summary	25
Section 2: The Methodology.....	27
Research Design and Approach	28
Participants.....	30
Selection Criteria and Contacting Potential Participants	32
Participant Sampling Size and Interviewing Participants.....	34

Ethical Protection of the Participants.....	34
Data Collection	37
Data Saturation.....	42
Role of the Researcher	43
Researcher’s Experiences and Biases Related to the Study.....	44
Data Analysis Methods	45
Interview Data.....	46
Coding.....	46
Triangulation.....	47
Member Checking.....	47
Evidence of Quality	48
Procedure for Discrepant Data and Cases.....	49
Data Analysis Results	50
Demographic Data and Participants.....	50
Icebreaker Question Results	52
Results for Research Questions	53
Conclusion of Findings	71
Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework	72
Limitations	74
Summary	75
Section 3: The Project.....	76
Description and Goals.....	77
Rationale	78

Review of the Literature	82
Project Description.....	87
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	89
Potential Barriers and Solutions.....	90
Implementation Timeline.....	92
Roles and Responsibilities	93
Project Evaluation Plan.....	93
Project Implications	98
Conclusion	99
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	101
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	101
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches	103
Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change	104
Scholarship.....	105
Project Development and Evaluation.....	106
Leadership and Change.....	107
Reflection on Self as a Scholar	108
Reflection on Importance of the Work	109
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	111
Conclusion	113
References.....	114
Appendix A: The White Paper Project	134

Appendix B: Research and Interview Questions	159
Appendix C: Interview Guide Script	161
Appendix D: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 1	163
Appendix E: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 2.....	165
Appendix F: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 3.....	168
Appendix G: Short Range Goals.....	170

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Information.....	36
Table 2. Long-Range Goals	92
Table A1. Demographics Table	149
Table A2. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 1	151
Table A3. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 2	153
Table A4. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 3	156
Table A5. Short Range Goals	163
Table A6. Long-Range Goals	165

Section 1: The Problem

Each year thousands of offenders are released back into their communities under state supervision. Many of those releasees do not have the skills or training necessary to find viable employment post-release (Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2016). According to the study site's school district's 2018 statistical report, the average offender has a 5th or 6th grade level education. Many do not have the necessary skills and training to be successful post-release; therefore, some may reoffend (Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Research (NCER, 2018), 67% of exoffenders will be rearrested, with 52% returning to prison within 3 years of release.

The greatest tool for fighting reoffending and recidivism is to increase the education level through vocational training skills or higher levels of academic education (Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2016; Scott, 2016). As such, education is considered an essential criminogenic need (Baird, 2017; James, 2018). A *criminogenic need* is defined as an unmet need that contributes to criminal behavior, however, it can be met and changed through interventions such education and vocational training.

According to James (2018) researchers can predict, with accuracy, that failure to meet individual criminogenic needs leads to recidivism. Recidivism may be reduced by following a treatment plan which considers the risk levels and intensity of intervention of treatment of the offender (Bourgon et al., 2018).

Self-efficacy may play a key role in reducing recidivism. A 2017 study found that using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) programming may assist in redirecting

offender thought processes, thereby positively affecting offender behavior through self-efficacy (Duwe, 2017). Increasing offender self-efficacy and combining educational programming enhances a successful transition into society post-release (Johnston et al., 2019). A study completed by the Research and Development Corporation (RAND Corporation) in 2014 at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice, concluded that the lack of participation and failure to obtain education or vocational training skills may contribute to recidivism, reoffending, and rearrests. Education and vocational programming were key factors in increasing positive self-efficacy and deterrence to crime (Johnston et al., 2019).

The RAND Corporation's study showed in 2013, 32 states offered basic education, GED courses, educational, and vocational courses (RAND, 2014). RAND reported correctional education programs substantially reduce re-incarceration. The Institute for Higher Education's (IHEP) study (Brick & Ajinkya, 2020) resulted in a finding that continued education improves offender experiences during incarceration and upon re-entry into society. However, according to another RAND study (Davis et al., 2017) about 6% of the total prison population of 43 states, nationwide, participated in education, higher education, or vocational studies in 2009-2010. This project study was an exploration of parolee perceptions of educational programs within the penal system. My study site's the penal education system has a significant problem of low or no participation in its education and vocational programs for adult incarcerated males and females.

The Local Problem

With respect to this study site, The Department of Criminal Justice offers educational and vocational training for its penal system; however, according to the study site's 2018 statistical report, 30% of the incarcerated population did not participate in the educational programs. This underperformance resulted in offenders with low educational or vocational training and skills returning to the communities unprepared for successful re-entry. This state's penal system contains one of the largest prison populations nationwide as reported in the state's 2018 statistical report, supporting 105 prison units which houses a daily average of 146,372 offenders, as well as, releasing thousands back into the communities annually.

In 2016, the prison system released 35,301 offenders to parole and 393 to mandatory adult supervision, resulting in 374,980 exoffenders being placed under state supervision as reported in the state's 2017 statistical report. Also reported was 30% of those releasees may not have received the educational or vocational skills necessary to be successful post-release since many of the releasees had not participated in the educational or vocational programs. In 2014-2015, with over 25,000 housed at a facility that provided penal education, this state reported over 5,000 enrolled in the education program, over 2,400 enrolled in Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, over 1,100 completed the General Education Development (GED) program, and over 1,800 enrolled in literacy programs. A study revealed that recidivism rates were approximately 21.4% and rearrests rates were at 62.5% (Smith, 2017). In contrast, five states in the United States dropped

their recidivism rates to consistently fall below 40% over a 5-year period (Schrantz et al., 2018).

The study site's penitentiary school district experienced problems with eligibility requirements for participation in education programs, partly due to evaluations of new offenders using the school district's Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP). According to the study site school district's 2018 statistical report, the ITP was data collected by the site's school district, and included information concerning the offender's age, program availability, projected release date and need for academic, vocational, and non-educational life skills courses. The school district reported other factors affecting eligibility requirements that hinder offender participation, such as the offender's projected release date, need for academic training, vocational training, life skills training, and other influences, as well as affect a large amount of the 30% target population who are not participating in the education programs. In addition, the availability of educational and vocational coursework may also have been contributing factors for low participation.

Another factor impacting low participation in educational programming at the study site was lack of educational and vocational programming provided by the school district in every prison unit. According to the school district's 2018 statistical report, 89 of the 105 state's prison units offered educational or vocational services, and also provided comparative educational services information between the study site and other state penitentiaries. This penitentiary supported one of the largest prisons and adult supervision populations (630,404 in 2017) which included a large population of non-English speaking offenders. Latino and other ethnic groups totaled 34.1% of the offender

population according to the site's school district's 2018 statistical report. As a result, language barriers may have been deterrents to participation. The school district reported in the 2018 statistical report though English as Second Language (ESL) classes were provided, educational and vocational classes were taught solely in English.

Nonparticipation in prison education services presented a problem in the state's education program. This nonparticipation may have led to offenders not receiving the training and skills necessary to find stable employment post release. The study site's school district provides educational and training programs such as the general education development (GED) tests, literacy classes, welding, or other vocational skills classes. According to a statistic report issued in 2016 by another state agency charged with prison oversight, vocational trades have expanded to include skills needed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) middle-level jobs.

The school district described for this study site was developed specifically and solely for this state's penal system. This site's school district does not operate in any other capacity. The school district's goal was to provide educational programming and services to eligible offenders as well as reduce recidivism by assisting offenders to become more productive and successful post-release. The school district offered the career and basic skills training for offenders however, due to budget constraints, programming is limited, and according to the district's 2018 statistical report, budget constraints and programming limitations may have been contributing factors for low programming participation. By understanding why 30% of the eligible offenders did not participate in the education programs, stakeholders may be able to use the information to

develop better educational and vocational programs and may increase the participation numbers.

The problem of low participation in the prison's education system prompted this qualitative study and has revealed a gap in practices where the problems affecting low participation have not been addressed. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of parolees concerning the state penitentiary's education and vocational programs and to explore and understand parolee reasons for low participation in those educational and vocational programs. The conceptual framework based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1977; Davis et al., 2017). The qualitative study's conceptual framework was built around three research questions that were focused on: parolee perceptions toward barriers for enrollment and participation in education programming during incarceration, strategies and supports that could have increased self-confidence and motivation to participate in the programs, and descriptions of internalized experiences toward the prison's education system.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Education and recidivism are common problems reoccurring in many state prison systems as well as at this study site. Prison officials were concerned lack of training and skills contributed to reoffending, rearrest, and recidivism as published in the study site's 2018 statistical report. In addition, according to the statistical report and a study by Gisi (2018) many adult offenders possess a 5th grade level of education. However, according to the study site's 2018 statistical report, an estimated 30% of the prison's population did

not participate in the penal educational and vocational training programs resulting in untrained exoffenders. Comparably, nationwide, approximately 70,000 offenders are released back into communities annually, however, around 32% return to prison at some point (Gisi, 2018). Exoffenders returning to the communities underprepared may be a contributing factor for rearrests and recidivism.

In this study site, many offenders were in need of additional education and skills. The study site's school district confirmed many new offenders entered the penal system with low self-esteem, low academic skills, and low academic successes. According to the school district's 2018 statistical report, the average age of offenders participating in academic programming was 32 years old with a history of academic failures. As offenders entered the system, they were tested for education levels and placement. Eligible offenders were evaluated and placed into the educational and vocational training program according to the ITP scores. Results from the study site's school district academic skills assessments showed many offenders who entered the penal system need educational and vocational training.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Low skills may have been a contributing factor to recidivism. Research has suggested that, though penal education was offered in many state and federal institutions, many offenders did not participate in the programs (Duwe, 2017). In fact, many offenders recidivate within three years of release (Duwe, 2017). Alper et al. (2018) discovered, in a study of 30 states, that 83% of state prison offenders released in 2005 were rearrested within 9 years of incarceration and that 68% of those offenders were re-arrested within 3

years of their release. The Bureau of Justice Statistics analyzed the offending patterns of 67,966 offenders in Alper et al.'s study and reported those 30 states accounted for 77% of all offenders released from state prisons in 2005. In response, the U. S. Attorney General created the Federal Interagency Council on Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry (FIRC) in March 2018 to combat the problem of high recidivism (The U. S. Department of Justice, 2018). Other studies such as one completed by the Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons (2016) discovered the fewer criminogenic needs met, the greater the chance of recidivism. Education is now considered to be a criminogenic need (Baird, 2017).

Some criminogenic needs could be addressed through interventions such as increasing education levels (Baird, 2017; James, 2018). According to its 2018 statistical report, 30% of the study site's penitentiary eligible population is not participating in the educational and vocational programs offered, this investigation into parolee perceptions has provided insight for future interventions may benefit those offenders currently incarcerated. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of parolees concerning the state penitentiary's education and vocational programs and to explore and understand parolee reasons for low participation in those educational and vocational programs.

Definition of Terms

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT): was a form of psychotherapy to treat problems and boosts happiness by modifying dysfunctional emotions, behaviors, and thoughts (Cherry, 2018; Duwe, 2017).

Criminogenic Needs: were characteristics, traits, problems, or issues of an individual directly related to the individual's likelihood to reoffend and commit another crime. There are two categories: static and dynamic risk factors. Static risk factors such as gender, nationality, or past problems cannot change. Dynamic risk factors such as education level, marital status, substance abuse, and employment status can change. (Baird, 2017; Duwe, 2017; James, 2018).

Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA): a law designed to strengthen the educational resources of the colleges and universities of the United States and to provide financial assistance to post-secondary students. The Act was signed into law on November 8, 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson (HOLC, 2018; Kagen, 2017).

Individualized treatment plan (ITP): initial data collected by the study site's school district on every offender includes the offender's age, program availability, projected release date and need for academic, vocational and life skills courses (School District Annual Report, 2018).

Mandatory adult supervision: a legislatively mandated release of a prisoner to parole supervision when the combination of actual calendar time and good conduct time equal the sentence. (Board of Pardons and Paroles Report, 2019).

National Department of Education Research Centers: The purposes of National Department of Education Research Centers were to contribute to the production and dissemination of rigorous evidence and products to provide practical solutions to important education problems in the United States (National Department of Education Research Centers, 2018).

Parole: the discretionary release of an offender, by a Board of Pardons and Paroles decision, to serve the remainder of a sentence in the community under supervision. Parole is considered a privilege, not a right (Board of Pardons and Paroles, 2013).

PELL Grants: are awarded to students for undergraduate and vocational studies, and are awarded by the Department of Education on a 'need basis'. President Donald Trump signed into law the Department of Defense and Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act, 2019, which increased the Pell Grant for the 2019-2020 award year. PELL grants were not loans; therefore, do not have to be repaid (Federal Student Aid Website).

Rational choice perspective (RCP): thought process based on the assumption individuals choose a course of action that most correlates with their personal preferences (Ferris et al, 2018).

Second Chance Pell: a pilot program developed in 2015 to allow eligible incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and pursue postsecondary education (McBeth, 2016).

Self-determination (SDT): basic human processes consisting of motivation, development, and wellness (Shippen et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy: a term refers to an individual's personal beliefs about their abilities to perform various tasks (Bandura, 1977; Ferris et al., 2018; Van Tol, 2017).

Significance of the Study

A gap in practice exists concerning low participation levels in the educational and vocational programs offered by the study site's education system. Educational programs are available, and studies indicate participation in educational programs increases offender success rates after re-entry into society. The findings of this study may aid in increasing the participation level in penal system educational and vocational programs for offenders during incarceration. This study investigated the perceptions of parolees towards the south-central state penitentiary's educational and vocational programs as well as investigated reasons for low participation in those programs. Just as significant, the study provided a voice for participants to express their views concerning the prison's education system. This study helped fill the gap in literature concerning those views of the participants as well as expressed how positive change could be derived from applying the results of the study towards future legislation.

Positive social change is a primary goal of Walden University and this study contributed to the goal. Positive social change is an important aspect of the mission of this south-central state criminal justice system which includes: (a) rehabilitating and reintegrating offenders into society, (b) supporting positive behavior, (c) providing for public safety, and (d) assisting victims of crimes. The study site may be able to maximize its mission and successfully rehabilitate offenders by providing increased access to educational and vocational training for more offenders while the offenders are under supervision, thereby, reducing recidivism post release.

This study may also promote social change by focusing on correctional education and its impact on society. Positive social change is possible through increased education and job skills that help to reduce recidivism. This study provided insights, experiences, and perceptions of parolees concerning the strengths and weaknesses in the existing educational and vocational programs within this south-central state penitentiary prison system.

Research Questions

The south-central state penitentiary penal system provides education and vocational training including literacy training, GED, and other educational and vocational skills training prior to release, yet 30% of its offenders are not participating in the programs. One of this south-central state penitentiary's mission goals is to rehabilitate offenders. Effective rehabilitation treatment should focus on addressing criminogenic needs such as increasing education levels and skills (James, 2018). This study investigated the perceptions and attitudes of the parolees towards penal education at the state penitentiary and the barriers that cause low participation. This project study's research questions were addressed through the lens of parolees:

RQ1: What do parolees perceive to be the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated?

RQ2: What strategies and supports could the education department and administration have taken to increase the parolee's self-confidence and motivation to participate in the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

RQ3: How do parolees at this south-central state penitentiary describe and internalize their experiences with the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I examined the perceptions of parolees toward prison education and vocation programs and investigated the barriers associated with non-participation in the penal education programs. I used the literature to demonstrate the need for further research into this phenomenon and established the conceptual framework that was used as the basis for the study. The literature review was organized under the following topic: the theory of self-efficacy. Additional topics addressed a short history of prison education and current education systems, and the need for on-line studies becoming available to incarcerated persons. The literature review used professional, scholarly material to provide a comprehensive understanding of how self-efficacy factors into penal education as a tool to reduce recidivism, rearrests, and reoffending.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy provided the conceptual framework for the study. According to Bandura, self-efficacy theory is a prediction of psychological changes and coping skills developed through different methods of self-efficacy treatments. The conceptual framework assisted in defining the design decisions and how the methods of data collection and analyses were conducted as well as based on an existing theory in a field of inquiry was related to the concept of the study (see Adom et al., 2018). This conceptual framework assisted in defining the design decisions, including

data collection and analyses. The RQ's were based on the framework as they opened the door to explore parolee perceptions of self. Because self-efficacy was the construct to be explored, how parolees view themselves and their abilities to succeed was investigated by this qualitative project study. According to Bandura's theory, self-efficacy is more than self-image; it includes self-confidence, self-esteem, optimism, and the belief in one's own abilities.

I used Bandura's (1977) constructs to examine the effects of the offenders' beliefs of controlling personal destinies by setting goals and using positive self-images to achieve those goals. In addition, self-efficacy may lead to the confidence to complete tasks resulting in beneficial outcomes (Ferris et al., 2018; Van Tol, 2017). Wood and Bandura (1989) theorized behavior could be influenced by observing and learning from others. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was the basis for concepts investigated how self-efficacy perceptions affecting recidivism post release; furthermore, Bandura's research resulted in understanding how increasing education in the prisons facilitates self-efficacy growth, higher academic achievement and greater goal realization.

Bandura (1986, 1988) developed the observational learning theory in the 1940's and eventually named it the social cognitive theory (see also Wood & Bandura, 1989). According to Bandura (1977) cognitive processes were paramount in the acquiring and retaining of new behavior patterns. The social cognitive behavior theory examined how self-efficacy affected educational programming and its impact on the educational programming of individuals involved in the criminal justice system (Ferris et al., 2018). According to Ferris et al., the social cognitive theory acts as a bridge between behaviorist

and cognitive learning theories as offenders use attention, memory, and motivation to influence positive self-perceptions in today's education practices.

The self-efficacy theory was part of the formulation of RQ2 because it focused on steps the administration and education departments this south-central state penitentiary has accomplished to help increase offender self-efficacy and self-confidence. Positive self-perceptions could motivate offenders to participate in educational and vocational programs. According to Bandura (1986, 1988) the models influence behavior must build self-assurance in one's capabilities along with skill building.

Additional self-efficacy theories have been developed in that other authors have done further work and expanded ideas in recent years. For example, Ferris et al., (2018) focused on different perspectives for working on one's personal self-efficacy, as one section of their research covered the fundamental concepts and theories surrounding self-efficacy. Vancouver et al., (2017) also surmised self-efficacy can be influenced by societal perceptions either positively or negatively. The self-efficacy phenomenon was important concerning offenders or parolees since their self-perceptions can be influenced by society. Vancouver et al., suggest by applying the self-efficacy theory to offender or parolee treatments, the offender or parolee's behavior may be influenced by a positive sense of self.

Strengthening self-efficacy is important to rehabilitation. The stronger the offender's or parolee's belief in self, the stronger the commitment and motivation of the person to attain positive goals (Van Tol, 2017). A parolee's perspective in personal cognitive abilities influences behavior, goal setting, and life choices (Jones, 2017). Self-

efficacy provides motivation for parolees to participate in post-release education and vocational training programs as attested by Van Tol (2017, who supported Bandura's (1993) theory that self-efficacy influences through positive cognitive and motivational beliefs.

According to Wood and Bandura (1989) a person's beliefs of self-efficacy can be in strengthened in four ways: (a) mastery of experiences, (b) modeling through observations of successful experiences of others, (c) social persuasion through increasing beliefs in one's own capabilities to achieve success, and (d) modifying self-beliefs of efficacy by enhancing one's physical status, to reduce the stress levels, or to alter dysfunctional thoughts. Wood and Bandura's (1989) theory was the basis for RQ1 in which I investigated the barriers preventing offenders from participating in the educational and vocational programs. Specifically, I wanted to understand whether those barriers were associated with problems of low self-efficacy matters.

Review of the Broader Problem

This literature review was developed from reading scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles, official websites on prison education, policies and practices, and various books on the topic of prison education. Supplementary information on recidivism rates (Duwe, 2017; Scott, 2016; TCR Staff, 2018), and information on the post-release life-styles of offenders who participated in the prison education programs while incarcerated (Jones, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Scott, 2016) was also reviewed. An exhaustive search of the literature was achieved through examining Walden University's online data bases such as Academic Research Complete, Education Research Complete, Educational

Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Sage. The searches were conducted using key words and terms such as desistance, self-efficacy, prison education, recidivism, reoffending, parolees, offenders, ex-offenders, prison education policies, and prison education programs, online penal education, adult education, juvenile education, and juvenile penal education. Other professional and scholarly journals included *Journal of Correctional Education*, *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, *Feminine Criminology*, *Journal of Correctional Education*, *International Policy Digest*, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences (IJCJS) – Official Journal of the South Asian Society of Criminology and Victimology (SASCV)*, *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *Critical Issues in Justice and Politics*, *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines*, and *Journal of Social Science for Policy Implications*.

How Self-efficacy Affects Goal Setting

Self-efficacy is important to post-release-plans. Van Tol (2017) attested offenders who participated in prison education while incarcerated possessed a higher level of self-efficacy post release. Combining the theories of Bandura (1977, 1986, & 1988), Ferris et al., (2018), Jones (2017), Van Tol (2017), and Wood & Bandura (1989) provided an understanding of how increasing penal system education aided in increasing positive self-efficacy and modified parolee behavior post release. Van Tol and Jones each suggested that self-efficacy helped all offenders to believe in themselves and their abilities while they set goals and overcame obstacles as the offender passed milestones.

Finally, parolees must be able to set attainable goals and be able to sustain their drive and motivation even when facing failure or challenges. RQ1 addressed this phenomenon by examining the parolee's motivation and belief in self to set attainable goals. According to Van Tol (2017), the beliefs people have in themselves determine how goals were set, however the goals must be realistic. Buchholz (2017) suggested increasing the offender's self-efficacy while the offender was incarcerated helped the offender post-release. In summary, researchers such as Buchholz (2017), Szifris et al. (2018), and Van Tol (2017) attested parolees' motivations were based in goal setting.

The Prison Education System and Programs

There are several aspects designed to increase adult learning incorporated into prison education systems and programs. Correctional education encompasses programming involves high school or GED programming, adult basic education (ABE), vocational, career and technical programs that may be provided by accredited or non-accredited institutions, or the prison itself (Castro & Gould, 2018). These educational programs may lead to degrees or certifications. Inmates who participate in post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) seem to possess a greater degree of self-confidence and self-efficacy (Jones, 2017; Mastroilli, 2016). The studies of Castro and Gould (2018), Jones (2017), and Mastroilli (2016) suggested self-efficacy may be improved through participation in adult education.

Correctional education spans over 200 years in the United States and has been a key factor in promoting positive offender change (Prigg, 2017). The first American prison education system was founded in Pennsylvania in 1787 by William Rogers. Later,

New York eliminated prison education and used the prison's inmates in mass production jobs. During the Great Depression, prisons eliminated education programs would not be provided again until Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) which was passed in 1965 (Kagen, 2017). Additionally, Title IV was a precedent to other programs such as Pell Grants and Stafford Loans.

In 1971, the rebellion in Attica State Prison in New York resulted in new prison reform (Mendez, 2017). By 1982, over 350 prison education programs had been developed and the Pell grant funded associate's, bachelor's, and master's studies; however, in 1994, the Pell grants were no longer available and some states disallowed college level coursework (Mendez, 2017). The NAACP, the New York State Correctional Association Department of Education, and prison authorities strongly protested the denial of Pell grants as a denial of civil rights (Prison Education, 2017; SpearIt, 2016). Congress had denied offenders the Pell grant in 1994 citing it was costly and coddling offenders, however, through various studies; lawmakers discovered prison education can reduce recidivism (Prison Education, 2017). This discovery led to reinstating Pell grants for offenders. According to Prigg (2017) by 2012 nearly all federal funding for Post-Secondary Correctional Education (PSCE) was abolished. However, in 2012 the Obama administration reestablished Pell grants to include offenders. Since then, the debate continues on whether or not prisoners should be punished, rehabilitated or both (Prigg, 2017).

Mastrorilli (2016) investigated the use of Pell grants to subsidize PSCE funding for offenders. Mastrorilli's study contained information on the effects of postsecondary

education on the success of offenders upon reentry and how the educational programs were funded. In the study three major themes were investigated: (a) the uses of correctional education, (b) how correctional education was implemented, and (c) correctional education outcomes. Mastrorilli's research findings provided an understanding of the benefits of PSCE. The U.S. Department of Education was providing PELL grants and education to prisoners in selected institutional programs and was using education programs to facilitate labor market participation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The education grants from federal sources help to provide a more varied adult educational program. Mastrorilli (2016) suggested some reasons such as convictions for sex crimes and involvement with drugs should not be disqualifiers for receiving PELL grants. Mastrorilli argued all offenders regardless of the conviction should have the right to education benefits.

Higher education is the training received after high school or its equivalency and usually involves college level coursework. Higher education through PSCE represents opportunities for offenders to receive services through the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program initiated in 2015 (Mastrorilli, 2016; McElreath et al., 2018). Studies show education and vocation training provide the skills that contribute to the reduction of reoffending and recidivism (Castro & Gould, 2018; Mastrorilli, 2016; Scott, 2016). The studies of Castro and Gould (2018), Mastrorilli (2016), and Scott (2016) resulted in congruous findings that prison and parole officials should promote participation of offenders in educational and vocational programming as a means to labor market participation. Implementing postsecondary educational programs and vocational

programs for offenders can contribute to public safety (Castro & Gould, 2018; Scott, 2016; Mastroilli, 2016). Mastroilli's research resulted in additional findings that positive self-efficacy of prisoners increased through postsecondary education. Studies such as those by Castro and Gould (2018), and Scott (2016) show prisoners who participate in prison education were less likely to reoffend and return to prison.

On-line Learning in the Penal System

The use of the Internet and digital technology have expanded and education opportunities have increased; however, there are some populations that do not have access to these opportunities (Willems et al., 2018). According to Willems, Farley, and Garner (2018) digital equity is a human right, therefore offenders should also have the right to participate in education via digital services. Offering education programming via online delivery is under consideration in some countries. Problems with low participation arise when offenders who are not familiar with digital technology do not know how to use the technology, therefore will not have the opportunity to take advantage of its benefits (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018; Willems et al., 2018). The United States and Australia are integrating modified online learning into the penal education systems (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018; Willems et al., 2018).

In Australia, the University of Southern Queensland has executed a project facilitating digital higher education (Farley & Willems, 2017). The project has been implemented in 20 sites in Queensland Western Australia, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, and Tasmania. The digital technology developed does not require the Internet, but allows inmates access to university courses and programs. The

programs are operated by using a server-based technology and notebooks. According to Willems et al. (2018), the University of Southern Queensland employs a Learning Management System (LMS) connected to selected university courses. Offenders do not have direct access to the Internet; therefore, education officers are tasked with downloading assignment information from the Internet into correctional center computers for the offenders (Farley & Willems, 2017; Willems et al., 2018). Willems et al. (2018) also reported offenders have access to five email addresses are used by the offender's relatives to download education information for the offender's assignments. In addition, correctional education centers are used as exam sites for offenders to complete coursework (Farley & Willems, 2017; Willems, Farley, & Garner, 2018).

Because dependence on the Internet and digital technology for all facets of learning and education, specifically higher education is increasing, developing online programming is paramount (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018). On May 16, 2011, the United Nations declared that access to the Internet is a human right (Farley & Willems, 2017; Willems et al., 2018). However, in some countries, prisoners without access to the Internet are experiencing barriers to education opportunities offered by non-prison providers. To date, the United States has not developed on-line learning options for incarcerated persons; however, Ohio has developed limited on-line services using tablets and distance learning (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018). Internet technology is a necessity in today's world and without technological literacy it will be difficult to function or find employment (Willems et al., 2018).

Ohio has developed a program that uses restricted Internet access in correctional education (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018). Since 2005, distance learning and online resources have grown with the Offender Network for Employment to STOP Recidivism (O.N.E.-STOP) program (Taliaferro & Pham, 2018). In 2013, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) allowed students to use tablet technology, which leads the state's Second Chance Pell program. Taliaferro and Pham (2018) attested the ODRC also collaborates with eleven other Ohio correctional facilities and Ashland University. According to Taliaferro and Pham, most other states in the United States do not allow Internet access for offenders due to security precautions, however; instructors and administrators may have limited online access and may offer training in computer-assisted programming.

Implications

The findings of the project study may lead to the information administrators and lawmakers need to improve the current education programming for offenders and parolees. A white paper entitled: *The Value of Penal Education* (Appendix A) is the result of the project study. This genre was best suited for the final project because it contains recommendations based on the findings that could be used by key stakeholders to develop new policies for additional educational and vocational programming for offenders and parolees, initiate professional training programs for all staff, create a management team of key agencies to supervise offenders, exoffenders, and parolees, improve hiring practices for education staff, create focus groups to investigate problems, and generate reports after specific time intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of changes.

Other genres such as an evaluation report would not be appropriate to represent my study because I did not conduct an evaluation or develop a theory. A curriculum plan would not be appropriate since I am not developing a course to be taught, nor am I developing a professional training curriculum. My analysis of the parolee interview data led more towards making suggestions for improving or resolving issues currently straining the study site's education system. The interview data was detailed and revealed that the study site could better use the white paper and its recommendations in current and future applications because it recommends reviewing its operations periodically to make adjustments in its operations and policies. If used properly, the recommendations from the white paper could be used without a time limit or expiration date.

Positive social change may be enhanced through a reduction of recidivism and increased exoffenders preparedness for reentry into society. By increasing the parolee's education, skill levels, self-efficacy, and motivation, desistance to crime could result in fewer rearrests and re-offenses. According to the south-central state penitentiary's 2018 statistical report, offenders who have a certification such as in industry, have a 22.5% lower recidivism rate as well as an 11.8% higher employment rate. The results of this project study may lead to safer communities and offenders who were more successful post-release. Tentative directions for future research stemming from this project include studies of the post-release lifestyles of exoffenders that investigates successes and failures that could be attributed to participation or nonparticipation in prison's education programs. Other studies may investigate the retention and rearrest rates of exoffenders who participated in penal education programs compared to those who did not participate.

Using the results of this project may provide a basis for additional research which could result in the development of richer penal educational programs.

Summary

The goal of my study was to explore the perceptions of parolees towards participation in the prison education system as well as provide a platform for their voices to be heard. Section 1 demonstrated a problem exists at the national and local levels of low enrollment and participation in penal education systems. The problem was researched through a review of professional and research literature. The literature review examined the perceptions of exoffenders and parolees towards prison education and vocation programs and investigates the barriers associated with non-participation in the penal education programs.

Section 2 includes the research methodology, justification of the research design, explanation of the data collection procedures, and a description of the data analysis process leading to the findings. The conceptual framework has directed the design decisions and how the methods of data collection and analysis were conducted. This study will provide an understanding of the perceptions of parolees to barriers for enrollment, participation, and completion of educational and vocational programs in a state's penal education system.

In Section 3, I discuss the project study and will discuss in detail the project's description, evaluation and implications. In a review of the literature and rationale, I will explain the importance of the study and justifies why there was a gap in studies that validates the necessity for the study. Section 4 contains the reflections and conclusions

resulting from the study, as well as discusses the value of positive social change, including the value of its benefits towards Walden University's mission. The discussion includes the strengths and limitations of the study, and provides recommendations for alternative approaches to facilitate additional studies. A reflection of the importance of the work, as well as applications and directions for the future is described in Section 4. Finally, a conclusion provides an overview of the entire project study and the white paper project is included as Appendix A.

Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of parolees concerning the state penitentiary's education and vocational programs and to explore and understand parolee reasons for low participation in those educational and vocational programs. In this section I discuss the research design and approach. I used a qualitative, exploratory research design to conduct semistructured interviews of seven parolees. I developed thematic categories concerning their experiences with the study site's education system using the following research questions:

RQ1: What did parolees perceive to be the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated?

RQ2: What strategies and supports could the education department and administration have taken to increase the parolee's self-confidence and motivation to participate in the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

RQ3: How do parolees in this south-central state penitentiary describe and internalize their experiences with the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

As a qualitative researcher, two of my tasks were responsibility for data collection and its analysis. I was the sole data collector and analyst and checked the accuracy of the data through the use of triangulation, multiple sources of data, and member checking. Triangulation and member checking were achieved through a comparison of the interview data from the participants and sending copies of summary transcripts of the interviews to the participants for their review for accuracy. I used actual quotes from the

participants' interviews to illustrate and enhance the importance of the experiences of the parolees which resulted in 12 themes. Using the information gathered from the themes, I was able to make several recommendations that I further developed into a white paper.

Research Design and Approach

I collected data on specific research problems from the perspective of the local population. My goal was to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. A qualitative research design should be selected for its uniqueness and what it can reveal about a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The phenomenon studied consisted of the perceptions and experiences of parolees from the study site concerning offender participation in prison education programs. Qualitative exploratory research involves four major characteristics: (a) a focus on the process, understanding, and meaning; (b) the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; (c) the process was inductive; and (d) the final product was meticulously descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative research described the outcome in detail to identify the key issues, and I analyzed the project using thematic categories (Western Sydney University, 2016). The thematic categories helped me organize the data and identified recurring patterns.

The descriptive qualitative exploratory research study was used to investigate the perceptions of parolees concerning the study site's education and vocational programs and to explore and understand parolee reasons for low participation in those educational and vocational programs. According to Fusch et al, (2018) qualitative methods are best when addressing social change. Studies have already shown that education is key to

decreasing recidivism (Castro & Gould , 2018; Jones , 2017; and Mastrorilli, 2016): This study may aid in providing insight for prison education officials from the parolee' perspective that could lead to increasing participation in prison educational and vocational programs. Decreasing recidivism could have a positive effect on parolees, in that the parolees would not re-offend or return to prison. A problem-solving case study would not be appropriate for this project because I am not trying to find a solution to a problem. The research questions were addressed using a qualitative research design to investigate and provide a detailed description and understanding of the phenomenon of the lack of participation of offenders in the penal education programs while they were incarcerated.

I used a qualitative design to explore the experiences and perceptions of parolees with the common experience of failing to participate in the prison education system. A qualitative research design was a better choice compared to a quantitative research design for this project study. Qualitative research uses in-depth data and provides greater contextual detail compared to that of a quantitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were the better method for collecting data on the offender's personal histories, perspectives, and experiences. The data results in a study were richly descriptive using words to illustrate the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data from qualitative research can include a tabulation of similar responses of those participants in the study population. This data could generate a more detailed and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon (Flick, 2018).

The quantitative method was not appropriate for these research questions. A quantitative approach would disallow the in-depth probing of contextual details of the interviewees and using a survey provides only broad data. A survey is more inflexible and does not allow asking why or how. A quantitative approach seeks to confirm hypotheses about phenomena by using instruments that are more rigid when eliciting and categorizing responses to questions (Boeren, 2017). A quantitative approach uses highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, closed-ended questions, and structured observation. Quantitative research methods refer to data that is characterized by being subjected to statistical analyses (Boeren, 2017). Because a quantitative approach strives to describe characteristics of a population, instead of focusing on individual experiences, this study, with a sample size of seven would not be suitable. In summary, a quantitative approach was determined less effective for gathering the type of data necessary to answer the research questions for this study.

Participants

The participants for study were seven parolees who did not participate in educational or vocational programs during incarceration. The participants must have served in the study site's penal system two or more years. Several participants served more than one prison sentence, but none of the participants participated in the educational programming during their first incarceration period. I also advertised on Facebook however, I did not receive any calls or contacts through that source. As I mentioned, in addition to Facebook ads, I also used snowball sampling. Additional potential

participants were reached through the snowballing technique by giving extra flyers to people at random or parolees for distribution to other parolees.

Contact with possible participants made through snowballing was achieved when participants or their family and friends referred other parolees through word of mouth or by giving the possible participant a flyer. Sometimes a possible participant called me or at other times I called the possible participant from a telephone number provided by the person who recommended the parolee. The participants were selected by determining their eligibility for the study when the first contact was made.

Selecting the participants who met the criteria without consideration of any other factors besides those listed in the criteria ensured a deliberate sample was chosen. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018) two of the most commonly used, deliberate sampling methods are (a) snowball sampling (when research participants recruit other participants), and (b) criterion sampling (selecting participants meet predetermined criteria). The participant selection was small and employed deliberate sampling to generate information from additional questions may emerge during the data collection process. Invitations continued until seven final participants were in the group.

Proof of incarceration was verified through the study site's official website because the information was a matter of public record. A researcher-participant working relationship was established during this initial questioning period to afford potential participants an opportunity to ask questions and to gain an understanding of the purpose of the study. Creating an atmosphere of professional rapport allowed the participants to feel at ease, comfortable, and open to converse.

Selection Criteria and Contacting Potential Participants

The criteria for selecting participants were predetermined. The participants must have been eligible, according to the standards of the study site education system's Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP) evaluation criteria, to participate in programming but voluntarily opted out of participation. Because I was not authorized to access the ITP files, I had to rely on the participant's truthfulness as to his or her eligibility for program participation. Participants were of varying ages, race, nationality, or gender and had served a minimum of 2 years incarcerated under the study site's supervision.

Purposeful sampling aided in obtaining specific knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and also helped others understand more about the phenomenon that I was researching; thus, I was looking for participants who met specific criteria. This platform also provided a voice for parolees to be heard. Parolees who transferred from the state's supervision to federal supervision were ineligible to participate without having first served a minimum of two years under state supervision prior to the transfer.

Nonfamiliarity was key to participation. Participants were screened during the initial contact to ensure nonfamiliarity with me and to ensure I did not know the participant or the participant's family members. By using the contact information provided by the potential participants, I contacted the potential participants via the United States Postal Service (USPS), email, or by telephone. A three-week window allowed time for potential participants to respond. In other instances, I obtained contact information immediately upon contact with the potential participants whom I met through referral from others. I left the potential participants a copy of my flyer which contained

information concerning the study and how to contact me. This same flyer was posted on my four Facebook pages. A wider dissemination of the flyer was completed by purchasing additional ad space through Facebook. I purchased \$20.00 of additional ad space that included dissemination to 2,500 additional businesses, a wider geographical area including other states, and other account holders outside of my personal account's friends list. Researchers may use social media to recruit and there are no guidelines other than following the rules of the social media platform and any relevant group administrators (i.e., Facebook; L. Munson, personal communication, September 11, 2019).

After gaining IRB approval (03-12-20-0667819), I began the study in March 2020 by using social media (purposeful sampling) and the snowballing technique. As per Walden Internal Review Board (IRB), researchers were approved to replace face-to-face contact with email, phone, video conference, or online format, including videoconferencing (Facebook, Zoom, Skype, and other similar applications; B. Saunders, personal communication, March 24, 2020). These procedures were necessary because all parole offices were closed to all visitors and parolees except new arrivals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All other parolees were required to stay home and were serviced by home visits from their assigned parole officers. I obtained contact information directly from the potential participants as they responded to the flyers or social media requests. I immediately began narrowing the pool to the participants who most closely matched the criteria. Potential participants were then contacted by telephone to establish a date and

time for the telephone, video chat, or Skype interview. The final participants opted for telephone interviews except one who opted to interview in person.

Participant Sampling Size and Interviewing Participants

Fewer participants possessing specific traits for a study are often sufficient to provide information power (Malterud et al, 2016). The more information the participants hold, the fewer participants necessary. Information power, in association with sample size, correlates to the study's aim. Using open-ended questions may cause thematic saturation with as few as 10 participant interviews (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018; Malterud et al., 2016; Weller et al, 2018). The data research was saturated when data became repetitive. The information sought was specific and the interviews were conducted by telephone or face-to-face as per the participant's wishes. By allowing the participant to select the interview type, privacy and anonymity were protected. The interview did not exceed one hour and was conducted in a way to afford privacy (Hardwick Research, 2019). Each interview began with demographic questions and yielded general descriptive information about each participant.

Ethical Protection of the Participants

This study involved participants who were formerly incarcerated. Incarcerated offenders are a restricted population; however, those who had been released from prison were interviewed as long as precautions were taken to conceal their identities as per Walden IRB policies. No participant's name was revealed or retained in permanent records any longer than necessary to complete the study. No parole officers or parole officials have access to any participant's identity, identifying traits, or any information

could lead to identifying any participant. Researchers have the ethical responsibility to protect their study participants from harm. All participants in the study were required to sign an informed consent form containing a clause clarifying protection from harm and assuring them participation was voluntary. I developed a working relationship with the participants and provided information on the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I explained the purpose of the informed consent form and the steps were taken to protect the participants' identities.

I used all measures as outlined by Walden University's protocols to protect the privacy of the participants. This included signed, adult consent forms prior to commencing the interview. The participants read the form and were given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had concerning the study. The consent form was explained in detail prior to their signature. The participants were asked permission to record the interview and I explained the necessity for recording the interview. The participants were informed they could withdraw from the interview or participation in the study at any time and were given the name of the point of contact person who could verify the study was legitimate. All interviews were conducted away from the parole or probation offices to further ensure confidentiality. Any information that may have led to identifying the participants was omitted from all paperwork. Though a professional working relationship was always maintained with the participants, a rapport was developed and controlled to prevent undue familiarity with the participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Developing a transparent and trusting relationship coupled with

respect resulted in informative and honest answers from the participants. This was confirmed when data was triangulated many answers were similar.

In the course of data collection and analysis, I protected participant confidentiality. During transcription of the interviews, no participant's name or identifying information was placed on the transcripts. Pseudonyms developed for my own use was the only method to identify a participant and information was not shared with anyone, nor was it left unsecured at any time. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), pseudonyms used throughout the entire research process assist in protecting the participants' identities. All participants were cautioned against discussing their participation in the study with parole officers or anyone associated with the south-central state penitentiary system. By adhering to these rules, the data collection was thorough and protected the participant's privacy. Additional steps to protect the participant's privacy included the storage of the data. All written data, including field notebooks, transcripts, and any other associated documentation were stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office. The laptop and digital recorder used in the research is kept in the locked office in my home. The laptop is password protected. At the conclusion of the study, all data stored on the laptop or digital recorder was downloaded to CD discs. The laptop and digital recorders were reformatted to erase the data. The CD discs and all written data was retained and will be stored for 5 years from the conclusion of the study (Medical Research Council, 2017).

Data Collection

As the interviewer, my main purpose was to collect specific information (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016) that provided an understanding of the population and its relevance to the research questions (Ravatch & Carl, 2016). Travel restrictions and government mandated against travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in most interviews being conducted by telephone. Data collection instruments for this study included audio recordings of the individual interviews, and interview notes taken during the interviews with the participants. Semistructured interviews allowed more flexibility than structured interviews as they allowed the participants to provide greater information and for the interviewer to follow-up on specific ideas (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The primary data collection instrument was the researcher, interview guide and script, interview notes, research journal, and audio recordings (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Audio taping the interviews which ranged from 21 to 34 minutes, allowed for a complete and accurate record of each interview, while the interview notes and research journal were additional notes that could not be captured on the audio recording. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018) the interview questions should be written in an interview guide and the

Demographic information was taken at the onset of each interview. This interview should not exceed 90 minutes. The sequence of the interview questions changed according to the participant's answers, however; I was able to control the direction of the interview. I allowed the interview to become more of a dialogue, rather than a strict question and answer period. I was able to obtain additional information using probing

(exploratory) questions and prompts (words or signals to the participant for more information). Participants were encouraged to speak freely of their experiences. According to Roulston and Choi (2018), conducting interviews semi formally allow greater understanding of the participant's perspective and attitudes towards their experiences. To protect participant's privacy, I conducted the interview by telephone at the participant's convenience, excluding the one face-to-face interview. information resulted in significant factors such as basic knowledge of the participant's age, gender, amount of time incarcerated, number of times incarcerated (see Table 1).

Table 1*Demographic Information*

	Parolee						
	#0001	#0002	#0003	#0004	#0005	#0006	#0007
Male	X					X	X
Female		X	X	X	X		
Under 50 years old during incarceration	X	X		X	X		X
Over 50 years old during incarceration			X			X	
Served on multiple prison units	X	X	X			X	X
Served more than one prison term	X	X	X			X	X
Completed required non-education courses: Changes, Bridges to Life, Cognitive Intervention, etc.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Earned a GED or completed Basic Education classes during a later prison term							X

Completed educational or vocational class during a later prison term		X			X	X
Participated or completed PSCE courses during a later prison term					X	X
Received cases affected parole						
Served a total of 15 years or more in prison		X			X	
Served 5 years or less in prison	X		X	X		

Upon gaining permission to record each interview, I used a digital recorder and handwritten notes recorded in my research journal to document the interview. All participants agreed to be recorded. A research journal was kept for recording observations and reflecting on phenomena relevant to the research study. This documentation was a method of recording the daily experiences of the researcher. Jeffels (2018) attested the research journal goes with the researcher into the field to record research methods and observations of what was seen and heard. Those notes were later used to complete the research paper. The research journal was the basis of my findings, thoughts, and analysis of the process.

The research journal and handwritten notes included observations of the one face-to-face interview. The participant seemed at ease and comfortable during the interview and offered several suggestions for additional classes and ways the staff could motivate offenders. The participant was self-assured and motivated to be successful since release and self-confidence was obvious. The handwritten notes including observations of body language, facial expressions, gestures, and other silent factors that could not be captured with an audio recording. The handwritten notes included descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Six interviews were conducted by telephone and one interview was conducted face-to-face. I used handwritten notes to record voice inflections, pauses, and feelings of excitement, dismay, anger, or other emotions. I noticed that many interviewees often repeated comments when emphasis on specific experiences was important. Other times,

the participants would pause as they reflected on a certain memory, then would continue as they added more information and details. Since observations should be recorded with as much detail as possible and should emphasize important direct quotes from the interview, I used my research journal to track and record additional notes, thoughts, or analyses as I transcribed the interviews. The interview guide (see Appendix B) for the interview was a semistructured, open-ended, informal conversational format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was non-judgmental, non-threatening, empathetic, and respectful which resulted in the participant feeling at more at ease and providing more in-depth answers.

Probing interview questions asked for a description of experiences with the educational programs while incarcerated. The conceptual framework drove the RQs since the framework was centered on self-efficacy and the parolee's identity of self and the capability to succeed. The interview questions contributed to the conceptual framework of the study in they defined the study concerning the perceptions and ideologies centered around offender participation in prison education programs. The interview questions were derived from the framework by soliciting examples and descriptions of the perceptions and thoughts of the participants. The interview questions were derived from three RQs.

Questions a, b, c, d, e, f, and g of the interview protocol (Appendix B) addressed the first research question which explored parolee perceptions to be the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated to determine if the parolee's perception of self had been a part of the problem of no participation. Questions a, b, and c of the interview protocol addressed the second research question which consisted of steps the education department and

administration could have taken to increase parolee self- confidence and motivation that could have led to participation in the educational and vocational programs. Questions a and b of the interview protocol addressed the third research question as to specific experiences the parolee endured concerning the educational and vocational systems.

The interviews were transcribed and a summary of the interview was mailed to each participant. Receipt of the information was verified with a follow up telephone call the following week. Reviewing the information afforded the participants the opportunity to refute, clarify and validate the information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants were given 10 days to respond to the transcript with concerns, otherwise, the summary was considered valid and the interview was accepted as a part of the study. No participant responded with questions or concerns; therefore, the participants' interviews were considered valid. The transcribed interviews, research journal notes, and demographic table were the method directing triangulation of the data collection process.

Data Saturation

The data saturation points or thematic saturation was reached when no new data was obtained and the participants began repeating information that had been gathered in another interview. Data saturation was reached quickly because interviews were transcribed and coded concluding each interview before another was commenced. Information power and thematic saturation was closely monitored throughout the interviewing process since coding began immediately as the interviews began. According to Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018), data saturation could occur in fewer interviews. Data saturation was quickly achieved because there was no need to collect extensive amounts

of data to answer the research questions. I knew the field was saturated when the interviews offered no new information. I also based my decision on data saturation by considering the audience who will read the completed work. The project sampling must convince the readers the sampling size, data saturation, and completed interviews were sufficient enough to make the study credible. The nature of the study, its complexity, and the data collection method contributed to the number of interviews necessary to reach data saturation. I used a variety of different methods to collect data such as interviews, field notes, and observations which helped reach data saturation faster. Data on the laptop was stored in labeled files, other information such as electronic records, professional articles and other computerized data were stored on my secured account with Zotero. Zotero is an open-source research tool helps collect, organize, store, manage, and cite bibliographic references such as books and articles, as well as a tool can be used to analyze research. Data such as research logs, cataloging systems, and reflective journals were labeled and stored according to the contents in the locked office's safe.

Role of the Researcher

As a corrections officer for 10 years and a parole officer for 5 years, I have personal knowledge of the prison education system. I have worked closely with offenders, ex-offenders, and parolees concerning their educational needs. As a parole officer, I was tasked with evaluating the education needs of parolees and assigning them to available classes and resources. No parolee I supervised was eligible to participate in the study.

As a staff trainer for the Parole Division, and later assigning training and education classes to parolees, I have collaborated with teachers and administrators in the study site's school district. I have also attended meetings with parole administrators when discussing new curriculum development and coursework to address the criminogenic needs of parolees, including how increasing education opportunities could address these needs. The meetings also addressed how increasing education participation could help reduce recidivism.

The interviews were semistructured, yet in-depth using open-ended questions (Appendix B) that controlled researcher bias, while allowing the participants to respond with confidence. Participants were encouraged to speak freely as I asked questions encouraging broader answers and clarification of unfamiliar terms or situations. I asked no leading questions that could invalidate the study (see Roulston & Choi, 2018). I avoided interjecting my own personal feelings and did not alert the participant when a person was mentioned who I am familiar with.

Researcher's Experiences and Biases Related to the Study

Being the sole researcher for collecting and analyzing data may have been a disadvantage for this study. I was employed with the study site for over 15 years where I worked with incarcerated men and women, parolees, persons under mandatory supervision, those on probation, as well as with instructors of the state penitentiary's school district. I also assisted in assessing the educational needs and enforcing program attendance for those individuals. I am now retired from parole and corrections and am no longer in communication with the study site's staff or personnel. Since I am no longer a

part of the study site's staff, I must contact potential participants directly through snowballing, social media, or referrals from participants.

My past association with the Corrections or Parole Divisions had little effect on data collection or caused any biases for this study. During my employment in corrections or parole, I was never tasked with developing or introducing motivational factors to entice offender participation in educational and vocational programs. I did not develop presentations, or recruit participation in the programs. I have never polled, surveyed, or questioned offenders as to why they opted out of participation in the prison's education system. To ensure a reduction for potential bias, I followed the strict protocols outlined in Walden University standards concerning data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

The purpose of data analysis was to investigate research questions and arrive at conclusions after analyzing the data. My data analysis began immediately after each interview and consisted of collecting, transcribing, coding, managing and organizing the interview data. The first step in analysis was to review the purpose of the study and the questions directing the inquiries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Moser and Korstjens (2018) qualitative research is an iterative approach and its emerging data is paramount; therefore, I moved intermittently back and forth between data collection and data analysis in order to collect rich data and findings. Immediately after the first interview I began the analysis process and began transcribing field notes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested to follow the customary steps for completing data analysis and interpretation include coding, establishing a central idea using the codes, finding themes

by analyzing the codes, using visuals to illustrate the results, interpreting the meanings of the results, and validating the findings using routine strategies that lead to a process called pattern coding. Data was collected and coded, patterns were located and placed into themes. Major themes were identified and categorized. From this categorized data, the results of the study were derived. Analyzing the data and the resulting findings provided answers to the RQ's led to the development of a white paper.

Interview Data

Transcribing the interviews was the next step after completing the interview. I transcribed interviews into a Word document. After transcribing the interviews, accuracy was checked by reading the transcription as the recording was played. This allowed for familiarity with the raw data after listening to the recording many times.

Coding

Coding focuses on ideas related to the study purpose and research questions. In this study, I investigated the result of the lack of offender participation in the south-central state penitentiary's educational and vocational programs. In open coding I repeated exact words or phrases used by the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As coding continued, I began to notice main themes related to the research questions. I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the interviews by using four columns: the RQs 1-3 (first column, the sub questions (second column), the participants' answers (third column), and the fourth column was for extra notes and observations). I tracked key code words and phrases using various colors to highlight the codes. Themes were the outcomes of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection. I underlined similar themes using various colors

and I later placed the themes into numbered categories. Categories were greater units of information derived from several codes which were combined into a common theme (Elliott, 2018), thereby utilizing the various types of coding data, analysts may make connections in relationships among the main themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Triangulation

Through the use of triangulation and multiple sources of data, the confirmability of the study was enhanced (Fusch et al, 2018). Triangulation was achieved by interviewing multiple participants, keeping a detailed research journal, and basing the study on a strong conceptual framework. Triangulation ensured the data had been saturated. Using triangulation aided when discussing document analysis of the professional literature, other studies, or field notes, and to the participant interviews.

Member Checking

Member checking was used to verify the accuracy of data after summarizing the main points from the interview. During the interview, member checking was incorporated during the data collection process through a specific questioning style used within semistructured interviews (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking was also achieved by examination for clarity through frequent summarizations and repeating back to the participant what was said, by asking the participant to verify statements, by reading aloud what I had written in my notes, and by the participants' examinations of the summary interview transcripts that were sent later. Member checking was further achieved by mailing interview summaries to the participants for the participant's review. Member

checking through the use of summary transcripts sent to the participants resulted in the confirmability, as well as validated accuracy reliability of the interviews.

During data collection, I used open-ended questions to investigate the participant's understanding and ideas of the practices of the educational system used by the organization, and to support the RQs. Those questions allowed additional in-depth questions and allowed participants to view and represent themselves as part of the prison's education system. The participants considered their thoughts and ideas and how their opinions were reflective of the educational system. Comparing participant's responses and comparing those responses to information from other sources helped to ensure the reliability of the information. Saldana (2016) suggested member checking could be used to validate preliminary findings.

Evidence of Quality

The credibility of the Research and Interview Questions guide (Appendix B) was ensured through practice interviews with colleagues and friends, as well as using personal knowledge from my years working in the corrections and parole divisions. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the role of the researcher in a qualitative study as the primary instrument was to apply the ethical standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability during the course of the study. Conducting the practice interviews with colleagues and friends prior to conducting the authentic interviews provided feedback and allowed me to adjust my approach as needed and ensured credibility of the interview guide and script. In-depth interviews using probing questions provided rich data to ensure the dependability of the findings as Ravitch and Carl (2016) attested was

of utmost importance to dependability for a reliable research design and data collection plan. Authenticity of the data was also validated through member checking when the participants reviewed the summaries of their interviews for accuracy and through triangulation when interviews transcripts were compared to each during coding and data analysis, though notes in the research log, and as listed as themes in Tables 2-3.

My sample did not cover every opinion for every parolee on parole; however, saturation was achieved through the use of open-ended questions, additional probing questions, and the research and interview questions guide provided rich and descriptive narratives from the participants. The small sample size and scope of the study was a limitation, however, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability was indicated by findings and context-relevant statements which can be utilized in broader settings. The sample covered a varied demographic population, however, no non-English speaking or Hispanic parolees participated in the study which resulted in no data for offenders who may have faced a language barrier.

Procedure for Discrepant Data and Cases

Discrepant information may be significant and may be based on factors such as age, level of experience, and gender. This study's discrepant information was coded and stored in a separate file. Saldana (2016) suggested encoding and storing all of the data to create a database in the form of codes and analytic memos. Discrepant information may revise, broaden and confirm the patterns emerging from the data analysis. Different participants may respond to the same question differently with their phrasing; however, the responses may still be conceptually related. Contradictions in data may strengthen

findings, as the discrepancy may provide unexpected findings and different viewpoints, which can bolster and enhance the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested to seek out misinterpretations or cases that do not fit the pattern or theme and scrutinize them further. Discrepant data and cases in this study were reported, evaluated, and analyzed in the Data Analysis Results section. Understanding the importance of discrepant information in this study could influence broader studies.

My discrepant information was minimal information was inconsistent with the majority of the information collected. I included discrepant information in the research journal and field notes. An instance of discrepant data was noted when one participant stated good officers were made when the officers were trained by the inmates. This is discrepant data since no other participants made such a statement and because this data was concerning training officers and staff and it aligned with of the need for additional training; however, it was not considered a new finding that required a recommendation. Offenders are not professional trainers for staff and would never be used as training officers for staff.

Data Analysis Results

Demographic Data and Participants

Each prospective participant was asked a series of demographic questions prior to the interview to ensure they met the inclusion criteria of having served a minimum of two years in one of the study site's prison units. The participants were selected through snowballing and referrals from people who had viewed the recruitment posters and by word of mouth. One respondent was disqualified due to never having been under parole

supervision and was thanked via telephone conversation along with an explanation for the disqualification. Two other respondents decided against participation during a telephone conversation and did not return their consent forms. They were also thanked for their interest. Though I was initially to interview 10 participants, the number was reduced to seven due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was authorized by my Chair and my URR via email dated 07/10/2020. My final number of qualified participants was 7.

Due to restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all prospective participants were contacted via telephone and no in-person visits were conducted. The governor and the mayor in the target region restricted travel to essential travel only and, at one point, issued 'stay at home' orders in May 2020. In response to the nationwide stay home orders from President of the United States, an e-mail from Walden University IRB dated 03/24/2020 authorized remote interview strategies to accommodate the local and federal essential travel and social distancing COVID-19 orders.

Initial contact, including demographic information and a mailing address, was conducted via telephone conversation. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form which was mailed through the USPS. Two copies of the form and a self-addressed envelope were mailed. The participants were required to sign their consent forms and were encouraged to call me if they had any questions about the study or the consent form prior to signing and returning the form.

The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Demographic data reported in Table 1 includes the participants gender, age range indicating over or under 50 years old, whether more than

one prison term was served, and whether or not the participant served on one more than one unit. Additional information included whether or not the participant received cases that affected parole status, and whether a time period of 5 through 15 years of total time was served in prison. Cases were written reports for behavior or regulation violations that could result in verbal reprimands, loss of privileges, reclassification, disqualification for parole, or other punitive punishments. No participant was ever denied parole due to receiving major cases for any reason. Four participants were female, three were male. All participants completed the required non-education classes mandated for parole eligibility.

Icebreaker Question Results

The participants were asked about their opinions concerning the education programs in the prisons. All of the participants knew about the education opportunities, but due to personal reasons, did not take participate in the programs. One participant during the first prison term was deemed to be a *knuckle-head* and was *flamboyant* due to a youthful age. Another participant was terminated for participation in classes due to being over 50 years in age. Five participants were eligible to participate in classes, but due to the length of time to get their names to the top of the classes' wait lists, and with the sentences being less than 3 years, by the time they were at the top of the wait list, they could not attend classes because they were to be released to parole within 6 months or less. The three participants who were eventually able to participate in the education programs did so because of receiving additional prison sentences with longer times. The one participant who received an associate's degree served a total prison time of nearly 20 years, as well as served more than one prison term.

Results for Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to explore the perceptions of parolees towards participation in the prison education system due to the problem at the national and local levels of low enrollment and participation in penal education systems. The conceptual framework, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, (Bandura, 1977; Davis et al., 2017) drove the three research questions as they were centered on the parolee's self-efficacy, identity of self, and the belief of the ability to succeed. The interview questions explored the perceptions and ideologies around offender participation in prison education programs, and were derived from the three RQs: exploration of parolee perceptions of the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated, steps the education department and administration could have taken to increase parolee self-confidence and motivation that could encouraged participation in the educational and vocational programs, and specific experiences the parolee endured concerning the educational and vocational systems.

Results for Research Question 1: Barriers for Enrollment and Participation

Research Question 1: Parolees' perceptions of barriers for enrollment and participation in the educational and vocational programs when they were incarcerated were investigated. An analysis of the data revealed four themes: (a) the threat of receiving major cases (write-ups), (b) non-education classes, i.e., Bridges to Life, Cognitive Intervention, Life Skills, etc. that were mandatory to complete, (c) curriculum education classes, i. e. GED, Basic Adult Education classes that could be applied for, and (d) long wait times before getting to the top of the list to attend classes.

All participants said the threat of receiving major cases was always present and believed staff and administrators used the threat as a method of management and control. One study resulted in a finding such as when prisoners do not experience staff decisions as fair or just results heighten tensions and induced stresses among the prison population (McGuire, 2018). One participant desired to participate in educational or vocational programs, but was terminated from the program due to advanced age; two participants did not want to attend education classes during their first prison sentences due to negative personal attitudes; and four participants wanted to learn trades or take classes but were paroled before they were able to begin the classes. Five participants stated the long wait times before being allowed to attend educational or vocational cases were major hindrances because the wait time usually took 2 or more years before getting to the top of the wait list. Additionally, all participants reported that no one who was within six months of release would be allowed to start any classes except the non-education classes. By the time the participant made it to the top of the list, the eligibility had expired because the participant would not have enough incarceration time left to complete the program. Several participants reported that desiring but being unable to participate in curriculum studies resulted in loss of motivation and feelings of disappointment, these feelings directly affected morale and self-image.

Theme 1: The Threat of Receiving Major Cases or Write-Ups.

The resulting backlash from a major case could mean the difference between being paroled or ‘set off’ (being denied parole for another year). One participant, #0001, stated one person receiving a major case could affect the entire class or the dorm where

he lived. He stated that the younger inmates who acted out and received cases caused the entire dorm to be put on 24-hour lockdown where no one could attend classes, church, or other nonessential movement around the unit. Sometimes the education staff would cancel the class for a week. Missing a day or any time from a class resulted in not being allowed to complete the class. The consequences for missing any portion of a class caused the participant to fall behind. There were no makeup classes, therefore, the participant was forced to wait until a new cycle for the class convened. The participant would attend the class for the missed lessons before completing the class.

Participant #0007's experience was similar to #0001 in those lockdowns caused exclusions from attending classes and in worst cases, could result in suspension from the class. Offenders who were suspended from mandatory classes were not granted parole and were set off (denied parole). Many of these participants did not receive major cases though some received minor cases for punitive violations such as possessing non-dangerous contraband (items not allowed in the dorms or anywhere in the prison). Minor case disciplinary actions resulted in verbal reprimands, commissary restriction (unable to buy items from the commissary) and recreation restriction. Restrictions generally lasted one week. Participant #0006 stated the staff wrote bogus" cases but, he always fought back by writing grievances on the officers and staff and further stated,

I done got wrote cases...bogus cases. But, see, I was...I was kinda flamboyant because I already had [an] education before I went to penitentiary. If they wrote me a bogus case, I file a grievance on him through the grievance department.

And, see, they got codes down there. Like, a lot of officers don't know, they got a

book called the PD-21. The PD-21 was the rules all the officers were governed by. Certain things they can and they can't do. It was a lot of officers did not know. A lot of them I wrote up, they know now. I done got a few fired and everything. Yeah, I done put that paper on a lot of them.

Participant #0006 further stated,

It was the officers. They would write bogus cases, but they know if you get a case...say, for instance, you get your FI, and they know if they write you a case, you gone [sic] lose that FI. But, if you got a person been doing 7, 8, 9 years, they finally give them an FI where they go home within a year and an officer write them a case, they can lose class and good time. Yeah, that makes them act up.

Theme 2: Non-Education Classes That Were Mandatory to Complete.

All parolees were required to attend certain non-educational classes in order to be eligible for parole. One particular class was *Bridges to Life*. Participant #0001 stated this class helped tremendously to the point all lessons and materials have been kept and are referred to even after release. Participant #0007 was required to attend *Life Skills* along with *Changes* in order to be granted parole and to maintain a low level of supervision. Participant #0004 and #0001 stated they were mandated to complete *Cognitive Intervention* because they had repetitive violations of the same crime. All offenders completed *Changes* where they acknowledged their crimes and wrote letters to their families apologizing for the crimes and the imprisonment, however, Participant #0001 did not feel *Changes* was a beneficial class. Participant #0001 stated, "The only thing in

Changes they have you write a letter to your family apologizing for the situation you done. That's not helping you. That's, that's not helping you.”

Theme 3: Curriculum Education Classes such as GED, Basic Adult Education Classes.

GED and Basic Adult Education classes were sometimes elusive. Participant #0005 was required to work from 6 a.m. to 12 noon, then attend non-educational classes from noon until 3 p.m. Participant #0005 was never afforded the opportunity to attend GED classes because of the long wait time to get to the top of the wait list and was paroled. Participant #0003 was scheduled to attend GED classes; however, attendance was cancelled due to the advanced age of being over 50 years old. Participant #0003 stated,

Naw, they said I was too old, they could be teaching the younger ones. The ones really need it...it would be difficult for me to go out in the world and try to find a job when you [are] 56 years old...naw it wasn't. 's what they said. And, they didn't encourage you on nothing. They didn't do nothing down [there].

Theme 4: Long Wait Times Before Getting to the Top of the List to Attend Classes.

Long wait times for classes were a deterrent for many. According to Participant #0004, approximately 20 I-60's (written requests) to attend classes was submitted. Participant #0004 waited nearly 2 years to get to the top of the wait list for classes and further stated,

No. it's just waiting a long period make you want to give up. It don't took [sic] a year or 2 for you to get in there, it make you want to give up. Like, they should really just put you in that area cause they get the I-60 you put in for. You shouldn't have to put in 4, 5, 6, 7, 8...almost 20 I-60's to get in a[n] education program before education even look at it.

Participant #0002 already had a GED upon entering prison and wanted to attend education classes such as computer courses or electrical trades. According to four participants, unless offenders have long sentences over 3 years, they would not have time to reach the top of the wait list nor have time to complete any educational or vocational trade program. According to participant #0001,

They told me I didn't have enough time, uh, to do that even though I did have enough. I had a lot of time but the time that I had, they felt like it wasn't enough to complete the courses. They feel like you're wasting their time."

Some participants felt they should have been placed into classes sooner, especially if they already had a level of education. Participants #0001 and #0002 stated short termers (offenders with 3 years or less) should be allowed to attend classes ahead of those long termers who will not be eligible for release or parole for many years after completing the programs. Participant #0001 stated,

You have to be doing at least 5 or 10 years before you can even, you know, you can take those courses. Why you offering the courses to people have a bunch of time because they can complete? They complete the course but then they were back in the dorm sitting around. When you can have someone 's about to go home

and they can use what you've taught them in [there] out here. You know, out here when they're free.

To gain a better understanding of the participants' perceptions to the barriers to enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programs, I asked them to describe some of the actions of the administrative or education staff hindered participation.

Several participants responded the staff or officers were the major hinderances due to how the staff and officers treated offenders. Many participants felt discouraged and belittled by certain staff. Participant #0006 stated a staff member told him,

You ain't gone do nothing no way.

These themes indicate the participants felt devalued and their voices went unheard by the administration and educational staff. Some felt they were being abused and mistreated with threats of documentation against them would damage their chances of release to parole. Some participants felt even though their periods of incarceration were 5 years or less, their incarcerations would have been better served by attending educational and vocational classes and learning skills could be applied upon release, instead, skills and training were wasted on offenders who would not be released for 10 years or more.

Results for Research Question 2: Strategies and Supports from the Education

Department and Administration

Research Question 2: What were steps the education department and administration could have taken to increase offender self-confidence and motivation to use the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated? An analysis of the data

revealed six themes: (a) encouragement from staff and administration to participate, (b) some offenders had to motivate themselves to succeed or turn to other offenders in order to remain encouraged, (c) negative actions or comments towards incarcerated people and revelations of personal information about the participant, (d) one on one interaction with educators pushing the participant to succeed, (e) the need for better trained and motivated education staff caused negative feelings, and (f) treat offenders with more respect in order to be respected.

The participants were encouraged to sign up for education classes upon evaluation of education needs through the initial ITP process. This process is detailed and includes the offender's education level as well as recommendations to meet the offender's criminogenic needs. The needs assessments are data of offender behaviors and attitudes which are related to the risk of recidivism and are comprised of static (risk factors do not change) and dynamic risk factors (factors can either change on their own or be changed through intervention) which classify the offender as being at a high, moderate, or low risk of recidivism (James, 2018). Some participants reported most staff seemed uncaring and did not push or encourage participation in educational or vocational programs. In those cases, the participants relied on support from their families, friends, and themselves to remain motivated for success. All participants felt staff and administrators were hindrances towards motivation due to negative feelings against incarcerated people which was exhibited by maltreatment, verbal abuse, and exposing personal or restricted information publicly about the participant's crimes. Those participants who were successful during later prison sentences reported one particular instructor took an interest

in the participant and pushed for the participant to complete education programs. Some participants reported the education staff were not always qualified for the job or was poorly motivated to do the job. Sometimes instructors did not show up for class or quit shortly after being hired resulting in incompleteness of coursework, in other instances, supervising staff sometimes misused their authority to mistreat, threaten or coerce offenders in the classrooms or other places.

Theme 5: Encouragement from Staff and Administration to Participate.

All new offenders were evaluated for education levels at the onset of incarceration. This process identifies education needs and aids in developing an individualized education plan for each offender. All participants were given recommendations for various classes apart from the required non-education classes. Participants #0003 and #0005 were both interested in earning their GED, however, Participant #0005 was later disqualified due to his advanced age, and Participant #0003 was paroled before he could begin classes even though he completed 5 years on a 10-year sentence. Participant #0003 stated,

Yeah, they quit having them for us down in [there]. Yea, I was one of the older ones. Cause we didn't go to class much, then they stopped having classes. At first, they was [sic]educational but then they stopped them [there].

Participant #0003 stated,

I wish I woulda got my GED, but I didn't stay there long enough. They sent me home.

Other participants such as Participant #0007 did not complete educational or vocational coursework until later sentences on other units. It was during his second tour he followed the ITP recommendations and earned his GED, which has become a great source of pride and self-esteem. Participant #0007 stated, “I got my GED in 2008, and ahh, ’s one of my ahh...one of my most prized possessions. ’s worth getting my GED. I was so proud of myself ‘cause I completed it.”

Theme 6: Some Offenders had to Motivate Themselves to Succeed or Turn to Other Offenders to Remain Encouraged.

Many of the participants felt the education and administration staff, as a whole, did not motivate or offer encouragement to offenders. Some participants, such as Participant #0004, learned to rely on themselves for strength. Participant #0001 maintained resiliency and motivation through his own self-reliance and encouragement from family, friends, or other offenders. Participant #0006 also learned to rely on himself. Participant #0001 stated,

No, my motivation was basically my family. I mean, I talked to a couple other inmates. I basically hung around older men. You know, they have wisdom. I said that was my motivation.

Participant #0001 further stated,

Me, personally, push yourself. Push yourself ‘cause, I feel like the main factors is: ‘What do you wanna do in life?’ I mean, I push myself ‘cause I was willing to do whatever it took to come home, I mean, being around a bunch of men all day.

That's not how, you know, that's not how I wanted to do the rest of my life, so.

Pushing yourself, I feel like was the best thing to do. We all make mistakes in life.

It's just how you gonna, how you gonna make it better.

Participant #0006 found self-reliance and self-motivation after having served nearly 20 years incarcerated. Participant #0006 stated,

Once you away from the free world and you down there where another person running your life...telling you what to do, when to do, how to do...you'll get tired of that. When a person was sick and tired of being sick and tired... was me. Let me go on and do this here, man, 'cause I know I need to gone and get up outta here. And, it took me...the first 20 years, I was crazy, I was acting a fool and I got tired of that and I had to see for myself. Now, I come down here by myself, I gotta do this by myself. My mama can't do it. My sister can't do it. My girl can't do it. I gotta do it myself. And, if I don't apply myself it ain't gone never get done. I'll still be here.

Participant #0004 also thought along those lines, he stated,

No. you have to encourage yourself. Either we did it or we didn't.

Many of the participants felt the staff were the greatest hinderances for success.

Some participants experienced negative comments and attitudes that bordered on personal prejudices against offenders. Some participants felt the staff treated offenders as though they were less than adults or were unworthy of respect. Participant #0001 stated,

Even though we were inmates and we have a certain number, we were still individuals. We were men. You still gonna have to go back into society and

everyone was not a bad character. We just made a mistake. Some employees were positive and some were not. I think they just need to give them a course on being positive and don't look at everybody like they were a bad person.

Theme 7: Negative Actions or Comments Toward Incarcerated People and Revelations of Personal Information About the Participant.

Participant #0004 felt the education staff categorized all offenders as drug abusers or publicly commented on the crimes the offenders had committed to show disdain for offenders. Participant #0004 stated,

A lot of teachers knew your crime and they wouldn't give you a chance. They were trying to beat around the bush and put it out there in so many words. They would put it out there just because we in there every last one of us have commit a crime, but we were on drugs and wasn't the case with me. That's why I got into it with so many people because they would think just because you commit a crime you had did some kind of drugs.

Participant #0002 stated,

Not with myself, personally, but I've seen the way some of the teachers talk to the students and 's just, you know, that doesn't encourage the student to want to be in your presence, to listen to your authority, but let alone, learn the lesson.

Participant #0006 stated,

Some of the teachers will make you feel down. Then you got some of the teachers...they not ready to help you. But then, you got some of them down there just dog you out.

In contrast, Participant #0006 stated,

It's the officers. Like I said, you got some 's good. Like the older officers...old convict officers. You got officers down there that know how to talk to inmates. And, they talk to inmates just like, 'Look here, man, you know This shit ain't gon go the way you want to, man. We better than that.

Theme 8: One-on-One Interaction with Educators Pushing the Participant to Succeed.

Some of the participants who were more successful during later tours or at other units, credit one or two instructors or staff who pushed and encouraged the participant to complete programs, courses of study or to do well. Both Participants: #0006 and #0007 met instructors who saw potential in these participants and used skill and finesse to motivate and push for success. Participant #0006 stated,

Mr S***** was a teacher down there. He a pusher. Mr S*****, ahh ahh ahh, Miss P*****. These were some of the teachers that stayed on inmates, they didn't care how they acted. But they know it was something in them. They pushed me. Stayed on me. 'You know you can do this here. You over there playing...you know you can do this man. Quit playing and get over there and do that.' They pushed me.

Participant #0007 stated,

I had a good teacher, man, and he pushed me. He...he pushed me. I think he seen something in me. I had a good teacher, but he would let me stay. I think the

classes was, like, 3 hours long. What they call, pre-GED classes. They was [sic], like, 3 hours long, and he would let me stay, like, [an] extra hour to get me ready.

**Theme 9: The Need for Better Trained and Motivated Education Staff
Caused Negative Feelings.**

There were instances when finding and retaining qualified staff to instruct classes were difficult. All education classes were conducted in the education building inside of the unit. There may be times when education staff may enter the unit and must go unescorted by security staff to the education building. No one who enters the prison unit may bear arms or weapons and the education staff find they were locked inside the unit unarmed and defenseless among offenders who may have committed violent crimes or murder. This may be cause for alarm for civilians who were not trained to deal with offenders. Some participants felt this lack of training as well as the lack of professional instructor training was a hinderance to those offenders desiring educational and vocational opportunities. Participant #0006 stated,

They don't need to be working in a prison. You in prison. You ain't got no angels in there. You might have some of them that's alright, but these [N-word] was murderers, rapists, drug dealers...I mean, you got killers. You have to be [an] extroverted person to deal with them, and if you can't deal with them on their level... You gotta know how. It's just like psychology 101. You just gotta know how to deal with them. I mean, 's all it is. It's a world of its own. And, if you ain't got the coping skills to deal with them, you ain't gone make it. I done seen female officers break down. I done seen, hell, I done seen male officers break down.

Participant #0006 further stated,

Man, cause some of the females they had teaching them dudes...man say. Some of the things they done... They run some of the staff off. Some of the female staff, 'I can't do it. I can't do it'.

Participants: #0004 and #0002 both agree the teaching staff were the major issues for the education program. #0004 stated,

They should get better teachers. People who look for a change in people.

Participant #0002 stated,

Get better educators and those people who want to do the job to educate. Be in there make a change and dedicate their time, effort, and energy into making a change. And, teaching and leading, you know, 'cause you can be an instructor but then also you could be a teacher, you know. A lot of people there were instructors.

Theme 10: Treat Offenders with More Respect in Order to be Respected.

All participants felt they were disrespected by the staff at various times during their incarcerations. All participants reported the staff expected to be respected at all times no matter what negative interactions may have transpired and some of the staff expected to be answered with "yes, sir", "no, sir", "yes, ma'am", and "no, ma'am".

Participant #0006 stated,

They didn't like where inmates would stick up for theyself. They think it's supposed to be 'yes, sir', and, 'no, sir'...naw...I'm a grown man like you is [are]. Imo [sic] respect you at your job capacity, but I'm not fixing to let you handle me in no kinda way because I'm incarcerated. It was all about respect thing.

These findings indicated the participants felt though they were encouraged to sign up for educational and vocational classes during the ITP process, they did not participate in the education programs for various reasons. Some participants did not feel motivated or encouraged by the education staff and sought to motivate themselves or gained confidence from family, friends, or other offenders. Other participants felt staff discouraged participation through the use of negative comments and demeaning behaviors. In contrast, some participants were able to succeed through one-on-one intervention from a resourceful staff member who pushed and encouraged the participant. However, the education department was besieged with retention issues for qualified instructors. Educators were sometimes intimidated by offenders and frightened to work on the unit while other instructors were not qualified for the job or doubled as correctional staff. Another major concern of the participants was the amount of disrespect shown towards offenders by staff. Even in the face of being disrespectful towards the offenders, the staff wanted to be respected for their positions as officers and education staff.

Results for Research Question 3: The Internalized Feelings of the Parolees

Research Question 3: How did parolees at the study site describe and internalize their experiences with the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated? An analysis of the data revealed two themes, (a) nepotism between education staff and the supervising staff caused feelings of anxiety among offenders, and (b) feelings of being judged.

Participants reported the education staff would be former supervising officers, or the relatives of ranking supervisory staff. In such cases, conflicts with the education staff could result in retaliation from the ranking supervisors. All participants reported feeling judged or looked down upon by correctional officers, teachers, or other staff. Some of these feelings of being judged were due to the mistreatment of staff and retaliation from senior staff because of interpersonal relationships between staff.

Nepotism can be described as giving a job to family members or friends without considering job skills or qualifications, or the appointment unqualified relatives and friends to positions in an organization to fill position or because the person needs the position, furthermore, nepotism can also be defined as hiring or promoting a relative or friend over other deserving qualified candidates for that particular position (Maswabi & Qing, 2017). Participants reported the education staff would be former supervising officers, or the relatives of ranking supervisory staff. In such cases, conflicts with the education staff could result in retaliation from the ranking supervisors. Additionally, all participants reported feeling judged or looked down upon by correctional officers, teachers, or other staff.

**Theme 11 Nepotism Between Education Staff and the Supervising Staff
Caused Feelings of Anxiety Among Offenders.**

Nepotism is an issue on many units. I have worked on several state penitentiary units and can attest to the fact each unit I worked on had members of various supervisory or education staff positions who were involved in personal relationships, dating, married or related, therefore the statements made by the participants were credible and true. Many

of the participants feared retaliation from supervisory staff after having conflicts with the education staff. Participant #0006 stated,

They got was a bunch of nepotism. You can't get in trouble with one and expect for the other one not to get mad. You got a sergeant 's seeing a sergeant. You got a lieutenant that her husband. So, if you have words with her, she go back to him and you got a major case.

Theme 12: Feelings of Being Judged.

Feelings of being looked down upon and being judged as less than a valuable person abounded with some participants. Participant #0004 responded she felt judged by the administration and education staff. Participant #0004 stated,

Don't judge them by what they have did and a lot of the teachers judged them by what they done...have did, so they know why they in there. A lot of teachers knew your crime and they wouldn't give you a chance.

Participant #0002 further stated,

I've seen the way some of the teachers talk to the students and that's just, you know, doesn't encourage the student to want to be in your presence, to listen to your authority, but let alone, learn the lesson.

These findings indicated the participants feared retaliation from supervisory staff if they had negative interactions with certain staff members because of the interpersonal relationships between those staff members. Losing 'good time (extra time earned towards early release)', demotions in supervision class (maximum, medium, or minimum levels of supervision), ineligibility for parole, loss of privileges, and other restrictions could be the

result of receiving major cases. According to Participant #0006, receiving major cases, losing class and good time caused many offenders to act out aggressively. Many participants felt the staff members 'looked down' on them and judged the participants harshly for being convicted felons. The offender's criminal record was restricted and confidential, however, there are some staff members who have the authority to review the offender's records. Participant #0004 reported his crimes were revealed during class time by the instructor and he was labeled a drug addict. Participant #0004 and the instructor had a verbal altercation and Participant #0004 received a case. This resulted in negative feelings towards the supervisory and education staff. Participant #0004 stated the education staff should not judge inmates, but should "give them a chance"

Conclusion of Findings

Qualitative methodology allowed for semistructured interviews of 7 parolees with the common experience of not participating in the prison's education program. Parolee perceptions were analyzed using an open coding process to derive categories, themes, and meanings. Twelve findings emerged: (a) threats of receiving major cases, (b) non-education classes, (c) education classes, (d) long wait times to attend classes, (e) encouragement to attend classes, (f) self-motivation to succeed, (g) negative actions or comments from staff, (h) one-on-one interaction with staff, (i) need for better trained staff, (j) treat offenders more respectfully, nepotism, and (k) feelings of being judged. This study provided the following recommendations: forming an IOM, providing professional training for staff, policy changes to include an improved curriculum for all,

cease hiring correctional staff as education instructor, and monitoring staff for inappropriate behaviors.

Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework

This study was based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to explore how parolees' perceptions of themselves affected how they viewed themselves and their abilities to succeed. Bandura further attested self-efficacy is one's beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in certain situations, and one's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura, 1977). This study has confirmed efficacy was more than self-image; it includes self-confidence, self-esteem, optimism, and the belief in one's own abilities. The participants interviewed showed confidence and a belief they could succeed in spite of the obstacles presented by the education staff, administration, or correctional staff. Though none of the participants participated in the educational and vocational programs offered during their first tours of incarceration, two later enrolled in Post-Secondary Correctional Education (PSCE) courses, with one parolee earning a degree. One parolee earned his GED, others enrolled in non-educational, educational, or vocational courses and acquired skills and life skills they still use today.

The participants reported they learned they must find motivation and encouragement wherever they can, whether through encourage from other offenders, family, friends, or from within themselves. It was with this sense of self-efficacy these parolees were able to successfully complete their tours of incarceration and return to society with positive attitudes. The participants reported during their years of

incarceration, they came to the realization that they would have to develop a belief in themselves and their abilities in order to complete their sentences. Two participants stated they came in alone and they would go home alone because no one was going to do their time for them.

The participants reported as a whole, the staff was a hinderance to motivation and learning, however, one or two staff members would sometimes see past the offenders' attitudes and would push the offender to succeed by offering encouragement, extra time, or help with difficult coursework. It was staff members such as these who increased offender positive self-image, self-efficacy, and motivation through demonstrations of professionalism and unbiasedness. Several participants reported they were placed in positions of peer mentoring or peer instructing. Acting in these positions gave the participants a positive sense of self-efficacy in they could help motivate and encourage other offenders. The participants were able to tutor and offer in-depth explanations in a language the other offenders could understand, aiding in the offenders' understandings of difficult coursework. One participant continues in this role today as a peer instructor where he reports. Upon release from their last tour of incarceration with the penitentiary system all of these participants except one have been successful in their communities and have found viable employment. The one participant who has not been successful and has been detained in the county jail several times on various charges. The participant has not found viable employment nor has retained a job for more than a few weeks. Additionally, drug and alcohol abuse continue to afflicting the participant. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy directly correlates with my themes, findings, and recommendations in that by

increasing the self-efficacy of offenders through (a) encouraging participation in penal education programs, (b) effective leadership and supervision of offenders and parolees, (c) developing teams and programs to monitor and mentor offenders and parolees, (e) initiating educational programs post release, (f) providing qualified instructors for offenders and parolees, and (g) developing policies that will stop nepotism may result in safer prisons and communities.

Limitations

This qualitative design and small sampling size make this study not generalizable for similar prison settings but may aid in making the research transferable. Qualitative researches are centered on the participants life experiences; therefore, this was a contributing factor for keeping sampling sizes small. An alternative approach to using a small sample size was to increase the sample size and increase the focus of study to include information on offenders who began a program of study but did not complete it; however, those factors could disqualify potential participants in this study. The disadvantage of a qualitative study such as this was the findings may not be extended to wider populations with the same degree of accuracy because other interviewees may not meet the criteria requirements required in this study. These interviews provided detailed descriptions and were the basis of the phenomenon of the inquiry (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

In a study such as this, according to Merriam (2019) the main limitations relate to the criteria used to select participants. Since the participants were from one specific state's penal system the scope of this study was limited to addressing one geographical

location. The study was limited to participants who did not participate in the penal education system, and only addresses population of offenders who were incarcerated 2 or more years in a state jail or state penitentiary. These findings may not be applicable to persons incarcerated in the federal penal system and did not serve time in the state system.

Another limitation of this study was time constraints. Only one researcher conducted all interviews and managed data. The data received and processed was centered around a specific, small sample. The amount of information from this small sample was voluminous and all of it was processed within a timely fashion in accordance with Walden University protocol.

Summary

The study centered the problem of low participation in the study site's educational and vocational system. In order to address the problem, I interviewed seven parolees using three RQs which resulted in data that were collected and analyzed. The three RQs were driven by the conceptual framework of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Of the 12 themes derived from the study I have conceived two recommendations that are addressed in a white paper: (1) policy and program changes in the state's prison education system to include the addition of an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) program which also includes advanced training for staff on managing offenders, and (2) policy changes implementing post release educational and vocational programs for parolees and ex-offenders. The data from this study and white paper could be used as a valuable resource in all state penitentiary systems to improve their education programs and close this gap in

practice. Section 3 will address and discuss the white paper which stemmed from the analyzed results. A further review of literature and research on IOM and the benefits of post education training for parolees and exoffenders justify the purpose of the white paper and its intended use. Section 3 also includes a description of the project and project goals, rationale for the chosen project genre, justification for recommendation, recommendations for implementation of policies, and project implications. The final portion of the Section 3 will include the project evaluation plan and the implications for social change.

Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of parolees towards the study site's educational and vocational programs, as well as, examine the reasons for low participation in those programs. The study site offers educational and vocational training in its penal system; however, the problem is 30% of the incarcerated population is not participating in the educational opportunities. Three research questions explored topics on: (a) parolee perceptions of barriers for enrollment and participation in the study site's educational and vocational programming, (b) strategies and supports the parolees perceive could increase their self-confidence and motivation, and (c) how parolees at the study site described and internalized their experiences.

In this study, I used an exploratory qualitative approach. The qualitative method allowed for semistructured interviews of seven parolees with the common experience of not participating in the prison's education program and resulted in rich critical data used to arrive at the findings and recommendations presented in Appendix E, F, and G. The

parolee interviews were analyzed using an open coding process to obtain categories and themes from which in twelve themes emerged: (a) threats of receiving major cases, (b) non-education classes, (c) education classes, (d) long wait times to attend classes, (e) encouragement to attend classes, (f) self-motivation to succeed, (g) negative actions or comments from staff, (h) one-on-one interaction with staff, (i) need for better trained staff, (j) treat offenders more respectfully, (k) nepotism, and (l) feelings of being judged.

Description and Goals

As part of this study, I created a white paper. A white paper is the project selected to represent the findings of this study and will be used to make recommendations to stakeholders for changes to the prison educational and vocational programs in the south-central state's prison system. White papers are called many names such as *action papers* or *position papers*. A white paper is a report that outlines a complex issue and may explore possible solutions to a problem (Ordway, 2018). This white paper is based on the data collection and data analysis which led to findings and reflected my professional knowledge of an important phenomenon.

This type of project may challenge existing concepts in the field and lead to new innovations (McGregor, 2019). Benefits of this project may lead to a reduction in rearrests, reoffending, and a reduction in recidivism, thus resulting in safer communities and more successful parolees as they reintegrate into society. In addition, this project has given parolees a platform to voice their experiences and opinions of the prison's education system. Government agencies commonly issue white papers to illustrate a specific position (Ordway, 2018). My white paper will be used to advocate for policy

changes such as the implementation of improved training for the supervision and management of offenders and paroles, the establishment of an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team, and the development of a more extensive educational and vocational program for offenders and parolees.

The project is entitled *The Value of Penal Education* (Appendix A). A copy of the summary of this project and the white paper project will be presented to the state's parole department and its governing board for review. Measurable goals can be obtained if policy changes are implemented, and according to Drailev (2000) goals need to be measurable and can result in tangible, concrete evidence. Measurable goals include tracking rearrests, reoffending, and recidivism over specific time intervals which are areas currently being tracked by the south-central state penal system I studied.

Rationale

White papers are used to present topics, study findings, and make recommendations (Bainomugisha, 2017). The goal of my study was to explore and understand the perceptions of parolees towards a penal education system and based on three research questions. I developed a white paper to present my findings and recommendations to the governing board administrators, prison school district administrators, and parole department directors to address the problems with the educational and vocational programs and offer solutions and policy recommendations that are measurable and cost-effective to implement.

To achieve this goal, I interviewed seven parolee participants who were eligible to participate in the prison's educational and vocational programs. I wanted to understand

the parolees' perceptions of the education system and used three RQs focused on elements of: parolee perceptions to be barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated, strategies and supports the parolees perceive could increase their self-confidence and motivation to participate in the educational and vocational programs, and how parolees at the study site describe and internalize their experiences with the educational and vocational programs.

The parolee participants in my study were asked semistructured interview questions to explore their perceptions of the prison's educational and vocational programs: the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming, steps that could have increased parolee self-confidence and motivation, and specific experiences the parolee endured. Though all participants were eligible to participate in the programs during their first prison terms, they opted out.

The participants expressed feelings of fear of doing or saying anything correctional or education staff could misconstrue as disrespectful which would result in disciplinary action, and the participants felt they were treated poorly. According to Kallman (2019) a perception of fear is not uncommon among offenders and parolees since a researcher in a different study discovered incarcerated students were afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing and would be punished. The participants in my study believed the education and correctional staff needed more training on how to properly manage and supervise offenders. Some participants felt better training for staff would decrease the number of disciplinary cases and altercations between staff and offenders.

The participants felt if educational and vocational programming were available to parolees post release, chances of successful reintegration into society would increase. According to Hjalmarsson et al. (2018), further education causes a significant reduction in criminal activity in both genders and education has an impact across all crime categories. Policy changes increase training for officers and staff in offender and parolee management and supervision, as well as additional educational and vocational programming during and after incarceration could increase parolees' self-efficacy and self-motivation perceptions. According to Kallman (2019), supportive educational environments forge a better connection to learning. In addition, advanced training could create an atmosphere of rehabilitation, education and work which would promote life skills rather than allowing criminal attitudes and subcultures to dominate (Maguire & Raynor, 2017). These findings derived from analyzing the data from the parolee interviews led me to complete a white paper that explained the problems and offered recommendations and solutions to the parole department and board administration.

A white paper was the most appropriate genre for this project. A white paper offered recommendations for solutions and provides insight to what is happening behind the scenes within the prison's education program. Sharing this academic research with policymakers and administrators should provide evidence-based research for improved decision making and planning. Establishing evidence-based practices should provide education staff, administrators, and policymakers with a more objective indication of effective practices and begin to change perceptions of trustworthiness, relevance, and the importance of educational research (Schirmer et al., 2016).

My study had several key results. The data resulting from the themes and findings discussed in the Data Analysis section of this study demonstrated offenders are motivated to participate in prison education programs and with a few well-planned changes and increased staff support, more offenders may participate in the programs. These changes may result in parolees released back into society better prepared for successful re-entry. Support from forming an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team could continue as an exit strategy for those higher risk offenders post release in an effort to discourage criminal activity (O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018).

In examining the problem of low participation in the south-central state's penal education program, and by exploring the perceptions parolees through the use of the RQ's, I can use this information to raise awareness with people who can make a difference and who can implement new policies and beneficial changes in the prison's education system. For these reasons a white paper report was the best choice to represent my study. The white paper report was based on the data collection and analysis from Section 2, which provided rich data from interviewing the parolees. The problem was addressed in the project by the participants' answers to the RQ's as they provided their perceptions of the problems with the prison's education system. I addressed the problem and purpose in the white paper by presenting the themes and findings provided from the interviews with the parolees and offered recommendations to resolve the problem and I also offered long term and short-term solutions which can be measured and adjusted over time.

Review of the Literature

A report by Carson (2018) concluded that by the end of 2015 over 1.5 million prisoners in the United States were under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities. In 2020, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2020) reported the percentage of incarcerated inmates at 77%; however, across the nation the problem of low participation in the penal education systems exist in all states. A review of literature on education services for incarcerated people revealed that access to penal education is not a guarantee of eligibility or participation in the programs according to the study site's 2019 statistical report. The prisons maintain power and work to dehumanize people inside of jails and prisons by regulating access to information or denial of that access (Austin & Villa-Nicholas, 2019).

One method of denial of information access is to deny access to the Internet. According to Willems et al., (2018), digital equity is a human right, therefore offenders should also have the right to participate in education via digital services. To date, no state in the United States allows offenders access to the Internet; however, allowing on-line access could broaden educational programming opportunities for offenders. Another method that may deny access to educational opportunities concerns disqualification from services during the initial intake process when new entries are evaluated for educational needs. New entries may be disqualified for advanced age, or short sentence lengths. For instance, the length of the GED program depends on the needs of each prison facility where the program may require 6 to 12 months on sentence time to qualify for participation (Cai, et al., 2019). Participation in education programming may also be

affected by a language barrier since all classes are taught in English at the study site, even though there are offenders of other ethnic groups who may not speak English well.

Many offenders enter the prison system with low education levels, and many have a 5th or 6th grade level of learning according to the study site's 2019 statistical report. However, Hamili, et al., (2017) found that 63.2% of offenders are motivated to participate in education programs, 54.7% of offenders would like to earn a degree, and 40.2% of offenders are planning for their future outside of prison. This information is in alignment with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy in which the offender's and parolee's view of self and self-motivation can affect a positive attitude for success outside of prison (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1988; Ferris et al., 2018; Van Tol, 2017; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

In this literature review, my study introduced literature to examine the perceptions of parolees towards prison educational and vocational programs and investigated methods that could resolve many issues causing low participation in the programs, as well as introduced literature on professional training programs for staff that could improve the management and supervision of offenders and parolees. One such management tool is the formation of an Integrated Offender Management team (IOM) which is a multi-agency team tasked with the supervision and management of offenders or others at risk of reoffending (Cram, 2018; O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). Maguire and Raynor (2017) provided information showing that continuity of case management is critical for the continued rehabilitation of exoffenders and parolees. In addition, arrests rates, reoffending, and recidivism was reduced over an 18-month period when IOM team

management protocols were introduced as a part of offender and parolee supervision (Hadfield, et al., 2020; Sleath & Brown, 2017).

Another management tool for offenders and parolees would consist of professional training for staff such as a program developed by the National Institute of Corrections. This training provides direct supervision strategies for offender management, including training for administration, first-line supervisors, and housing unit officers (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). Studies have shown that the more support offered to offenders and ex-offenders, the lesser the chance of reoffending (National Institute of Corrections, 2020; O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). In addition, the literature review in my study provided valuable research on the need for further research into parolee perceptions in other areas besides penal education, as well as established the conceptual framework which assisted in defining the design decisions and the methods of data collection and analyses. A study project was the most appropriate genre for addressing the problem of low participation in the study site's penal education system because the qualitative research data was acquired through interviewing parolees with the commonalities of serving in the study site's penitentiaries and non-participation in the prison's education system.

Bandura's (1977) theory and the exploratory method of research support the project in that with the data from the parolees, I was able to find studies to support the reasons why positive self-efficacy is important for the successful reintegration of parolees and exoffenders into their communities. In Section 2, my findings included: (a) continual threats of major cases, (b) denial of parole, (c) completing non-education mandatory

classes, (d) need for life skills type classes, (e) age may disqualify participation, (f) limited choices for education coursework, (g) higher education coursework unavailable, (h) short sentence times disqualify for participation, (i) long wait times for classes, (j) moral support from families and friends, (k) harassment from staff, (l) exposing of criminal information by staff, (m) one-on-one assistance from staff was low, (n) unqualified instructors, (o) frequent absenteeism and resignation of staff, (p) poorly motivated staff, (q) education staff doubling as instructors, (r) nepotism, (s) negative judgement from staff, and (t) feelings of being disrespected or devalued. Through the interview process, I found that all of the participants at some point in time felt stigmatized by correctional and education staff. Stigmatism affects positive self-efficacy in that the perceived stigma could cause negative adjustment in areas of recidivism, substance dependence, mental health symptoms, and community adjustment post release (Jakobs, 2019). According to Moore, et al., (2018) mental health problems are factors, as well as antisocial characteristics and low self-esteem issues among offenders who receive or anticipate stigmas. In contrast, Rogers and Miller (2018) theorized restorative justice using specific programming and restorative approaches may reduce recidivism and improve procedural outcomes.

Several problems caused negative interactions between offenders and staff, such as feelings of being disrespected, judged, having criminal activity exposed, and nepotism between staff sometimes caused altercations between the staff and offenders. These altercations could lead to major cases and denial of parole. Professional training from an organization that specializes in training staff to manage and supervise offenders such as

the National Institute of Corrections could resolve or minimize these problems (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). The specialized training uses cognitive interventions, therapies, and programming to implement cognitive social learning techniques to influence change because they are the most effective techniques to help offenders learn new attitudes and behaviors (Arvidson, 2019; National Institute of Corrections, 2020). Other issues such as staff absenteeism, unqualified instructors, lack of motivation from staff, limited programming, ageism, and long wait times for classes outweighed the benefits of self-motivation, motivation from family and friends and motivation from one-on-one support from staff. However, according to studies by Amoke, et al., (2020), Barnes, et al. (2017), and Brazão, et al., (2017) using Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches offenders to use their cognitive reasoning abilities to resolve self-esteem and self-motivation issues as a therapeutic approach to reducing recidivism. Additionally, the cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most widely used intervention in prisons utilizing mindfulness-based interventions that are believed to be effective on wide domains of physical and mental health problems (Amoke, et al., 2020; Pakpour & Poorebrahim, 2020). In addition, Yoon, et al., (2017) found that CBT may be an effective treatment for prisoners suffering from anxiety and depression.

The literature review provided information supporting the development of the white paper and its relevance to the findings in Section 2. Searches were conducted using keywords and terms such as *prison education, recidivism, parolees, offenders, exoffenders, and prison education programs, managing offenders, managing parolees, education post release, nepotism, the National Institute of Corrections, cognitive-*

behavioral therapy, Integrated Offender Management team, and stigmatizing offenders.

This literature review was developed from reading scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles, official websites on prison education, policies and practices, and various books on the topic of prison education. Walden University's online databases such as Academic Research Complete, Education Research Complete, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Sage. The review of literature was supported by peer-reviewed sources written and published between 2017-2021. Saturation of the literature was achieved through searching Walden University's online databases as well as using the literature and other databases listed.

Project Description

Self-efficacy and a positive self-image are foundational for offender and parolee motivations for success. According to Jarjoura (2019) parolees who participate in the penal education programs are different from other offenders, in that, those releasees are transformed in their self-perceptions. My study of the perceptions of seven parolees towards the educational and vocational programming in a south-central state's prison education system resulted in the development of a white paper that chronicles the parolees' motivational and academic needs. The white paper provided an overview of the study, reported the study results, and shared the proposed recommendations for administrators and policymakers. I shared offenders and parolees do possess drive and motivation when supported by the correctional and education staff but felt devalued, humiliated, and intimidated when treated with hostility, disrespect, and threats of disciplinary actions. Incarceration is a negative influence and can have the effect of

internalizing a criminal self-concept, therefore positive motivation from staff would be paramount going forward.

Participants described changes and improvements that could be made. The participants in the study felt policy changes to include a better curriculum, better instructors, and better management and supervisory training for all staff would increase offender participation in the education programs and increased participation would result in better prepared releasees. Several interviewees felt a postsecondary education curriculum would benefit parolees post-release and could be funded by programs such as Pell grants. Pell grants for incarcerated people would allow for receiving the education and training necessary to fill entry level jobs (VERA, 2019).

According to Kallaman (2019), increasing knowledge causes feelings of positive well-being and education can offer those positive emotional and social benefits. Results would be measurable over time in areas such as recidivism rates, reoffending and rearrest rates, successful re-integrations into society. Benefits would also include fewer disciplinary cases from correctional and education staff, fewer altercations between offenders and staff, fewer uses of force, better retention of instructors, and better management of offenders. The National Institute of Corrections agency has developed training programs, technical assistance, and information on offender management (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). Another recommendation included developing an IOM team which when composed of essential agencies would assist with parolee management post-release and aid in a successful re-integration into the communities. A summary of this study provided to administrators and policymakers will offer

recommendations which are evidence based using empirical research for utilizing a professional training source such as the National Institute of Corrections and the formation of an IOM team.

The objective of the study was to answer the research questions by investigating the perceptions of parolees towards the south-central prison's education program and to provide the necessary insight that resulted in this project. Recommendations for solutions to the issues surrounding the prison's education system used the white paper report as a guide. The result of the white paper provided details for implementing evidence-based research strategies to support offender and parolee's self-efficacy and motivation, as well as provided ideas to increase participation in the prison's education system through an analysis of literature and study findings. Offenders and parolees can be motivated several ways: cognitive control (because they want to learn); goal orientation (to achieve a specified goal); activity orientation (something to pass the time) and avoidance posture (to avoid another less enjoyable activity) (Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019). Promoting and supporting motivation-oriented strategies could be the keys ultimately leading to successful parolees. According to the American Enterprise Institute (2017) this type of evidence-based research could lead to prison systems becoming more cost effective and more successful in reducing recidivism as well as improve the prison's educational system, reduce prison populations, and increase the use of risk assessment instruments.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

To disseminate the white paper, I will need access to resources to include administrative support, access to stakeholders, access to a presentation venue or

videoconferencing software, and meeting times. All administrators of the parole department or governing board have published email and post addresses and some have published telephone contacts; therefore, they may be contacted directly. A power-point presentation and my white paper report may be emailed or mailed by USPS and could be accessed during a video conference. Using Microsoft PowerPoint is the most useful, and accessible way to create and present visual aids (Visual Sculptors Staff, 2018) and creates a visual effect to illustrate my ideas and concepts. The administrators will be responsible for further dissemination of the white paper, power-point presentation, and any other pertinent information.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

White papers are generally created with a specific audience and goal in mind. The paper may be rejected by the administration, policymakers, and parole department, who may decide implementing educational and vocational services for ex-offenders, parolees, and probationers too costly. This resistance to change the prison's education system is not unusual. According to Gozzoli. et al., (2018) resistance is natural in the process of change; therefore, I may be required to present statistical data to support implementing the educational and vocational services and explain why implementing such a program would be cost effective in the future.

California is pursuing legislation proposing rehabilitative educational programming for parolees and has estimated this policy will reduce prison incarceration up to 20% (Californians for Safety and Justice, 2017). Another study showed statistical evidence presenting the cost benefits of post-secondary education for incarcerated people has

garnered bipartisan support for increased federal investments in career and technical education (CTE) and postsecondary programming for incarcerated people (Bacon et al., 2020). A reduction in the prison population could save thousands of dollars annually and better education and training could prepare parolees to be more successful in their re-integration back to society. A possible solution to this barrier may be to conduct a detailed analysis of the costs of programming over a 5-year period to illustrate the rates of recidivism and re-imprisonment costs compared to the savings and costs of housing returning ex-offenders. This was demonstrated by a study from the Minnesota prison system that showed successful participation in one recidivism-reduction intervention lowered the odds of recidivism by 12%, while involvement in two effective programs decreased recidivism by 26% (Duwe & Clark, 2016), effectively reducing costs significantly. Another study was conducted in Indiana by the American Institutes for Research resulted in similar findings that reducing the recidivism rate by 1% would save state and taxpayers \$1.5 million (Jarjoura, 2019).

A second potential barrier to my recommendations may be resistance to fund additional training for the education and correction staff. However, a system of strategic inmate management (SIM) through professional offender and parolee supervision and management training promotes safer and more secure prison environments utilizing the best practices of direct supervision and inmate behavior control (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). The National Institute of Corrections can provide the training for these practices and is applicable for both prisons and jails. A possible solution to this barrier may be to conduct additional research on the effectiveness of advanced training

on the morale, and improved supervisory and management skills of staff. A study may be conducted to compare the use of improved skills over time, measured by the number of altercations and uses of force against offenders and parolees, reductions in disciplinary actions or violations by offenders and parolees, and successful reintegration into society.

The hesitancy of different agencies being transparent and assisting each other to achieve a conducive working relationship is also a potential barrier. The implementation of IOM of all organizations from within the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) is a multi-agency coordination effort for the handling of offenders or others at risk of reoffending (O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). However, some agencies do not always work well with others. The resistance to the change may affect the implementation and effectiveness of the IOM team, thus compromising the relationship of people and their work. In addition, resistance could create situations of disinvestment and create situations of conflict, rivalries, and tensions (Gozzoli et al., 2018). A solution to this barrier may be establishing a board of members from the various organizations holding key positions and implementing guidelines and policies all could agree on.

Implementation Timeline

Upon approval of the study and project by Walden University, the white paper (see Appendix A) would be provided to the south-central state's parole department and its governing board. I would request a meeting to discuss the project's findings taking place near the time of budget discussions and proposals for the new fiscal year. The brief audiovisual presentation would highlight the problem, the research results, and the recommendations and solutions. If my findings are adopted for consideration, I would

discuss further dissemination to its school district and any other stakeholders using videoconferencing software.

Roles and Responsibilities

My responsibility would be to present the research findings and the white paper with its recommendations and solutions of the research study to stakeholders. I would initially disseminate the white paper to key administrators then disseminate the information to any other staff or administrators as directed. I would assist with promoting my recommendations and possible solutions as described in the white paper. I would serve as a resource person, if requested, to assist with support team or committee formation. All committee members would be responsible for working together to help develop and implement policies, train staff, and oversee educational and vocational programs for offenders and parolees.

Project Evaluation Plan

Qualitative and quantitative measures are recommended to assess the effectiveness of this project as each have their own unique paradigm for gathering and analyzing data; however, they achieve the same goals (Daniel, 2016). The goals of this project include short goals, as illustrated in Appendix G.

One short-term goal includes forming a board to evaluate recommendations that can be implemented immediately or within a year. Using the Likert-style question format, I would conduct on-line surveys to collect quantitative data from parolees, administrators, and staff at various time intervals to obtain statistics on the strategies and recommendations of the effectiveness of the suggested changes in policies, training, and

education programming. Likert scales are used in survey research because they allow easy operationalization of personality traits or perceptions to assess opinions, attitudes, or behaviors (Bhandari, 2020). The time intervals for evaluations should be in yearly increments of 5 years because the range of time between 3 to 5 years for events to be tracked and measured is the standard according to the Restore Justice Foundation (2020). Surveys would be conducted at those same intervals on focus groups of participants to provide qualitative data since qualitative data can be taken from focus groups or responses from questionnaires (Dewitt Wallace Library, 2019). This would increase validity of the evaluation plan by providing feedback from parolees, administrators, and staff as they elaborate on their experiences. Long term goals are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2*Long-Range Goals*

Long-Range Goals		
Goal	Examination method	Time interval
Forming an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team using multiple local government agencies together from statutory and non-criminal offices	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	Two to 3 years
	Monitoring staff, offender, and parolee interactions	
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking uses of force against offenders and parolees	
	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders and parolees against staff	
Development of post-release educational and vocational programs for parolees	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Two to 3 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee, and the curriculum would have to be developed
	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	
Policy and lawmakers examine the costs of implementing new policies and programs	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	Two to 3 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee, as well as pass in the state's legislative branch to authorize the spending
	Tracking and comparing the costs of the programs and policies to the projected benefits	

Quantitative data would be taken from surveys of the administrators, parole department staff, correctional staff, and education department staff to provide answers to questions about the frequency of a phenomenon, or how the phenomenon affected a specific group. Quantitative data is derived from surveys, polls, or questionnaires of a specific population and is used for mathematical calculations and statistical analysis for the purpose of statistical analysis (Allen, 2017). The quantitative data would provide statistical reports and information to be used in improving or modifying policies, training, and programs. The feedback from both qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to develop a guide each year for the purpose of continuous improvement of policies and programs.

The evaluation planned for this project is an outcomes-based evaluation which is the measurable effects the program will accomplish since the goal of outcomes-based evaluations is to find the best result (Gaines, 2021). The outcomes-based evaluations determine how well a program achieved its goals and objectives by measuring the results using clearly defined objectives. Outcome-based evaluation is the tool to measure a program's results as well as identifying observations that can credibly demonstrate change. The information gathered from the outcome-based evaluations will be used to implement or adjust the training of staff for offender and parolee supervision and management, implement future curriculum for offenders and parolees, evaluate the effectiveness of the IOM and adjust its goals and direction as needed, and introduce new policies as needed by policy and lawmakers. The overall effectiveness of the short range and long-range goals will be measured in increments of 5 years by tracking recidivism,

reoffending, rearrests, successful re-entry of parolees into society, tracking disciplinary cases, staff-offender assaults, and participation of offenders and parolees in the education and vocation programs.

Evaluations are critical steps and should be considered throughout the planning and implementation of a project, rather than reserved as an end-of-project activity (De Silets, 2018). Because laws and policies from local, state, and federal governments constantly change, these 5-year evaluations should be on going indefinitely so that the prison's board and other stakeholders would always be in accordance with the law and legal obligations. Similarly, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) identified three reasons to evaluate training programs: to improve the program, to maximize transfer of learning to behavior and subsequent organizational results, and to demonstrate the value of training to the organization. The key stakeholders in the project evaluations from my study would include parolees, administrators of the parole department and members of the governing board since all stakeholders should evaluate the effectiveness of any adjustments or changes, using feedback for the continuous improvement of the state's prison education system. Improving the prison's education system may positively promote social change in that parolees released from prison would be better prepared to re-enter society, thus reducing recidivism, promoting positive parolee self-worth and easier reintegration into their communities. Providing additional education and training for parolees ensures that the parolees will be able to procure viable employment to support themselves and their families as well as contribute to the economy. Local stakeholders such as parole officer and local government agencies from statutory and

non-criminal offices would work together to manage high risk parolees, while allowing minimal risk parolees to live life and enjoy their freedom.

Project Implications

The purpose of this white paper is to address the perceptions of parolees and their experiences while incarcerated in a south-central state's prison system. White papers employ research from studies to advocate a solution for a problem (Bainomugisha, 2017). The results of my study provide insight to the readers and a new perspective on how implementing new policies, training, and educational programming in the penal education system may positively influence a more productive system for offenders and parolees. Parolees in this study stated they experienced difficulties dealing with correctional and education staff and were made to feel inadequate and devalued. My white paper provides a view into the psyche of the parolees and their experiences during incarceration as well as includes recommendations and solutions for changes in policies, training, and additional programming for the education system.

The white paper addressed specific concerns and made recommendations to address and resolve those concerns. If the administration and governing board implements new policies, training, and additional education programs, they may implement a sustainable and measurable educational and vocational program will reduce recidivism and promote a more positive professional relationship between prison staff and offenders, and parole officers and parolees. If the administration and governing board use the study's findings and the white paper, they have the potential to disseminate their findings to a broader audience who may use the information to raise awareness and

enhance the state's prison education systems. Currently, there are thousands of offenders released every year into society, but little to no tracking, data, or research has been conducted on the post release conditions and lives of the ex-offenders. Findings such as this may cause other states to recognize the value of research-based evidence, as well as conduct research into other areas concerning the success or failure rate of parolees. The study has the potential to promote positive social change and may result in policy changes resulting in increased parolee self-confidence, self-motivation, and preparedness for re-entry into society as well as decreased recidivism, reoffending, and rearrests which could lead to safer communities. Additionally, the study's recommendations may result in improved communications and work relationships between local agencies that could lead to better management and supervision of exoffenders and parolees.

Conclusion

The development of a white paper was the result of this study's findings to address deficiencies in educational and vocational programing, offender management, and supervisory training for staff. The white paper (Appendix A) was a detailed account of the importance in developing new policies, training programs and additional educational programing for offenders and parolees. Based on the analysis of interviews with parolees who have had experiences spanning many years of dealing with a south-central state's penal education system, this insight clarified many of the experiences and problems associated with the prison's education system.

Recommendations and suggestions for solutions for the parole department, administration, and governing board were presented to develop new policies, training

programs for staff, and additional education programs for offenders and parolees. Section 3 advised implementing new programs and policies that may have a far-reaching effect on other state's prison education programs. Barriers and possible solutions to those barriers were discussed, along with possible future research. A time frame for measuring the effects of implementing new policies and programing included measuring the progress of changes in relationships between staff and offenders, and recidivism. Program participations should be surveyed every year for 5 years. Additionally, Section 3 included a description of the project and project goals, rationales for the chosen project genre, justifications for recommendations, a project evaluation plan, and implications for positive social change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Serving time in a prison can be a difficult existence. In addition to having to deal with offenders who may be troublemakers, some offenders must contend with the education and correctional staff who are openly biased against offenders. This project was an investigation into the mindsets of parolees and their perceptions towards participation in penal education in a south-central state's penitentiary system. In qualitative studies, the people who know the most about a phenomenon should be recruited as participants because of their first-hand knowledge (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

It is for this reason I chose to interview parolees who have witnessed prison education practices. The analysis of the parolees' responses indicated many offenders believe they are mistreated and abused by staff; however, with self-motivation, encouraging each other, and the occasional push from dedicated instructors, some offenders are released back into society to become successful parolees. Analysis of the literature showed a resolution to bring to light the plight of parolees and resulted in the development of a white paper project. The project offered findings and recommendations for possible solutions to key stakeholders for implementation of policies, and expansion of the education curriculum, as well as a management tool to aid in improved offender management and supervision.

Project Strengths and Limitations

This project's strength is apparent in the perspectives of parolees regarding the prison system and its education system. The qualitative study exposed parolee perceptions of the benefits and pitfalls of participating in the educational and vocational

programs. This investigation revealed what can motivate offenders or cause offenders to become disheartened and uninterested in participating in the penal education programs. The study's supporting literature and findings resulted in recommendations policy makers, staff, and the parole department can use to improve the entire prison system's educational and vocational programs while producing measurable results over time. The white paper addressed the issues affecting offenders and parolees, then provided solutions and recommendations to resolve those issues.

The white paper contributed to the strength of the study by outlining the problems and solutions to provide stakeholders with the tools to implement new policies, training procedures, and offender management guidelines. According to Hilton and Anderson (2018), change is facilitated when members of an organization who are most familiar with the problems contribute to the solutions. The white paper is concise and to the point with well thought out recommendations and solutions. Stakeholders can incorporate research-based strategies to improve the entire state's education system, however, there are limitations to the project.

One limitation identified is the focus on only one state's education system and a small sample size. In some cases, a small sample size may suggest the conclusions are less reliable. According to Asiret and Sünbül (2016), larger sample sizes can be more accurate and produce more reliable findings. Another limitation is the south-central state's administrative board, parole department, and prison's school system may reject the findings and recommendations suggested in the white paper. This is problematic in

that the recommendations include the sharing of information with multiple agencies and relying on the agencies to converge and work together to effect change.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Investigated in this study was a south-central state penitentiary education system having the problem of low or no participation in its education programs from its offender population. Offender perceptions of themselves and their supervision seemed to have a major effect on the success or failure of participation in those educational and vocational programs that later impacted the success or failure of re-integration into society as parolees. The problem was addressed through private interviews with parolees who did not participate in the prison's education programs when they initially entered the penal system, though they were eligible. However, positive self-efficacy through self-motivation and by believing in themselves eventually inspired my participants to take a second look at prison education.

A white paper was developed to address the problem of offender motivation, barriers to participation, and self-perceptions, and included recommendations for policy changes, curriculum development, and increased training for the supervision and management of offenders. If the recommendations in the white paper were to be implemented, the key stakeholders would be able to measure rates of successes or failures in offender management during incarceration, parolee re-integration into society, and recidivism over periods of time. Findings from data gathered over these time intervals could be used to improve and adjust specific areas as needed.

An alternative to a quantitative approach to address the problem of low offender participation in the educational and vocational programs would be this qualitative approach which was used to investigate the methods of supervision, offender management, and interactions between staff and offenders by conducting interviews, focus groups, and direct observation of classroom supervision. This data would be derived from the staffs' perspectives to answer why the offender participation in the education programs is low. Another alternative approach could be to build a professional development team such as the implementation of an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team. The team would be a multi-agency coordination effort for the management of offenders during incarceration and supervising parolees at risk of reoffending. A program of this type would require the input of an interprofessional team. The team would have to surpass defensive resistance which could affect the change progress by hindering and slowing it down until it is blocked (Gozzoli et al., 2018). The problem such a team would have to overcome is to learn to be transparent and work toward the common goal.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

I have grown as a scholar and practitioner through this project. Prior to entering this program, I had experience as a corrections officer, then later as a parole officer. During my tenure as a parole officer, I was a staff trainer for parole officers and staff. I was tasked with research and writing lectures; however, my research was never at the doctoral level. Participating in this doctoral program and completing this project has helped me grow in two key areas: I have come to understand the role and value of

research in education and project development, and I have completed a project, that if accepted by the stakeholders, could affect positive change through policy implementation and improvements in a penal system's education program.

Scholarship

Having developed this project helped me to understand the theoretical basis for understanding the parolees' perspectives and to provide a voice for the parolees to be heard, and to apply disciplinary knowledge to present my findings in a scholarly fashion. I was able to demonstrate scholarship through conducting extensive research for literature reviews to support parolee self-perceptions and self-motivations to succeed even as they were faced with obstacles discouraging them from participating in the penal education system. I used peer reviewed articles, academic journals, and government sources to record diverse perspectives from various researchers in the field. This information presented the most accurate data to support the study. Using a qualitative approach, gathering a sample of participants of various ages, backgrounds, genders, and amounts of total incarceration lengths, and by conducting semi-structured interviews helped me produce the data necessary to answer the research questions.

This study allowed me to present the reality of the local problem. The literature saturation presented me with the knowledge to conduct research and provided insight into the perceptions of parolees and how their self-image determines their successes or failures when participating in penal education programs. This study helped me to realize knowledge gained through research should be shared as it may improve best practices. I discovered one method of disseminating the knowledge is through a white paper. My

white paper helped me communicate the problem and provide possible solutions and recommendations to resolve the problem. This project helped me grow in ways I had never imagined.

Project Development and Evaluation

A white paper resulted as the project development and evaluation from this study. The white paper project was the right choice for an individually developed doctoral project. I used related theory, current literature, and research results to identify potential recommendations and solutions. Researching white paper literature helped me understand how white papers can be used to promote action and effect positive social change, as well as, provided recommendations for policy changes and improvements for staff training and management of offenders that could transcend nationally to other prison systems. The white paper illustrated the importance of identifying the perceptions of parolees towards the educational and vocational programs of a penal system and what motivated their participation or lack of participation in those programs. The task of project development and evaluation highlighted the importance of developing a good professional rapport when supervising offenders academically, which promotes maintaining positive motivation and participation in the penal education system. Conducting this type of research could be enhanced when working with the parole department and the prison's school district to obtain information from the staffs' perspectives. A variety of perspectives from both parolees and staff would have yielded richer data.

I am looking forward to presenting this project to key stakeholders. The recommendations for policy changes and implementation of improved training for correctional and education staff may be well received since they are researched based and can yield measurable results over time. Project development and evaluation are essential parts of research focus on policy effectiveness and policy recommendations. The researcher analyzes the data and findings of the study to develop potential solutions or make viable recommendations. These actions are the keys to scholarly research.

Leadership and Change

I have discovered to be a true leader and effect true positive change in the penal education system I must be willing to have an open mind and be receptive to the ideas and perceptions of others. Prior to researching this study, I never thought to ask parolees how they felt about the penal education system. Research such as this is transformational for me because I had the experience of seeing the penal education system through the lens of the parolees. It was an eye opener to discover how parolees perceive to be abused and mistreated, and how correctional and education staff provide little motivation for participation in the education programs. My experience was always from the viewpoint of correctional and education staff; however, I knew participation in the educational and vocational programs has always been low. Now, I know why. Having completed this study, I understand the role leaders play in the dissemination of research-based data, the sharing of evidence, and proposing solutions to problems. Leaders must be able to discern problems within an organization, analyze them objectively and produce data

useful to the organization. Presenting the information to key stakeholders and encouraging their input would produce the best outcomes.

I plan to be a leader of change for this south-central state's penal education system. I plan to present my findings to the administrative board, parole department, and prison's school district to demonstrate my commitment to assist in finding viable solutions to the problem of low participation in the educational and vocational programs. If my recommendations and suggestions are not accepted by these stakeholders, I am committed to working with the parole department and prison school district in additional research in a direction they feel would be more valuable. I would also be willing to present my findings and recommendations to other agencies that could assist in developing an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team. As a leader and educator, my purpose is to empower others, by using my wealth of knowledge, to broaden their patterns of thinking and to strive towards greatness.

Reflection on Self as a Scholar

This doctoral experience has been a dream of mine since I was in high school. My mother sparked the fire that has resulted in lifelong learning for me when she asked me to be the first one of our family to graduate from college. During this journey, I have used self-reflection as a tool to remain focused and to bolster myself as a leader. It was through my leadership and encouragement our that family now has four additional college graduates, two of which have earned master's degrees. After retiring from the Navy, I have continued my education and earned an associate degree, an additional bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and now this doctoral degree. What pleases me the

most about this doctoral degree is I learned how to conduct and complete a study. I have learned and understand the value of scholarly and research-based data to investigate problems and arrive at logical solutions and recommendations.

Now that I have completed this study, I have the tools necessary to become a valuable contributor to future studies concerning life after prison, recidivism, and post release education opportunities. Sharing these types of studies with prison system officials could promote positive social change not only for the one state I studied but could affect all prison education systems nationally and worldwide. My experience with the prison education system began when I was a corrections officer, and I viewed the educational and vocational programs through the lens of a corrections supervisor. After completing this study, I have had the opportunity to investigate the system through the eyes of the offender. As a scholar, I was able to compile data and convert the information into a format can be used by prison administrators and officials who have the power to make policy changes.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The results of this study are significant. The potentially long-lasting benefits of this work could be valuable to the penal education system in establishing and implementing staff training and policy implementation affecting prison staff and offenders. By improving the education system for offenders during incarceration, the opportunities for successful re-integration into the communities could improve because of positive parolee self-motivation and confidence. Providing educational and vocational training for parolees could increase their marketability so they could find more stable

employment and careers. The more successful the parolee, the less chance for rearrest, reoffending, and decreased recidivism. Building positive self-efficacy, motivation, and self-image in offenders and parolees promote successful transitions post-release. Those attributes are measurable outcomes prison officials can use to adjust or implement policies and training to improve the education programs.

Recommendations and solutions are also important. Identifying and investigating the local problem and offering recommendations and solutions to the problem could produce long-lasting effects for the local prison education system. Potentially, this study site could become a model that other states model their penal education systems after. This project study focused on one problem and does not address every problem; however, it may begin the process by prison officials to implement change.

Change takes work. As an educator, I know dedication is the driving force for those seeking to be change agents whether the education system is within a penal system or in the free world. Doing this work will require a team effort requiring a collaboration among many agencies working during incarceration and post release. Developing an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team is only the first step. Continuing research and conducting more project studies into different facets of parolees' lives post release would aid in making recommendations for the types of post educational and vocational programs that are needed. Studies have shown education is a criminogenic need; providing the appropriate education is the key. I would like to pursue other research projects to improve the penal education system for the state I studied and use future studies to help establish post release educational and vocational programs for parolees.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The white paper that resulted from my study has indicated improved training for staff, establishment of an IOM team, a more extensive education curriculum, and implementation of new policies that would produce measurable outcomes stakeholders could use to continually update and improve the penal education system. These improvements could affect positive social change in the communities as recidivism, rearrests, and reoffending rates drop. The findings and recommendations in the white paper could provide insight into building a new model for the parole department, policy makers, and the administration board to use for over-hauling the existing education system. The findings could aid the corrections and education staff to improve their management and supervision of offenders and parolees which will promote a better rapport between offenders, parolees, and staff to decrease altercations, and reports of violations against offenders and parolees. Prioritizing the perceptions of offenders and parolees to use when developing new educational and vocational programs could increase participation when offenders and parolees believe their needs are being met without fear of negative consequences.

There are many potential ways to increase offender participation in education. By creating a less hostile environment devoid of fear of harassment or disciplinary actions, more offenders and parolees would be motivated to successfully complete educational and vocational programs. Studying the perceptions of parolees toward the penal education system provided insight the problems associated with low participation in the educational and vocational programs and how they should be addressed. This project

exposed the perceptions of injustices facing offenders and why so many offenders refuse to participate in the penal education programs. The qualitative analysis of my project showed the importance of how an environment can affect motivation and self-perceptions.

Empirical research supporting best practices for motivating offenders and parolees and applying the study's recommendations could lead to future research studies and result in greater improvements. The themes and findings of the project led to the development of a white paper that served as a vehicle to raise awareness to the necessity of positive management and supervision of offenders and parolees to increase participation in the penal educational and vocational programs. The white paper report's purpose was to offer recommendations to apply specifically to the educational and vocational programs of a south-central state's education system and to help implement strategies to motivate and support offenders and parolees, as well as create a potential for sharing those findings with other state and federal penal education systems.

The recommendations may become the basic model for penal education nationwide. By including a recommendation to collect measurable data over time, future researchers could use these findings to lay the foundation for future quantitative and qualitative research such as life after prison and parole. A study such as this could provide more information for improving the educational and vocational programs during and after incarceration. Though my study involved one state and focused on the perceptions of a small group of parolees, additional research could be conducted to

explore the perceptions of staff, administrators, or exoffenders who are not under state supervision.

Conclusion

This final section is composed of my reflections on the study and is focused on the study's implications, limitations, strengths, and the application of the findings. My final analysis is my understanding of how this project influenced me as a scholar and educator. As a scholar, my reflections of self have taught me the value of sound empirical research that will direct me as an educator at the collegiate level. My actions will be grounded in socially responsible applications of best practices.

During this study, I have found the treatment of offenders affects their self-image, and the offenders' perceptions of their environment can motivate or cause disinterest in an educational system designed to prepare them for successful re-entry into society. During my interviews, I discovered all of the parolees had an innate desire to learn, but the desire was sometimes dampened or extinguished due to the actions of the corrections and education staff. As a practitioner, I was able to identify problems that hinder participation in the state's prison education system and work to find solutions. Stakeholders now have recommendations to help resolve some of their problems. In a collaboration such as this, when educators and stakeholders work to together to find solutions, we all benefit as a society.

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Appendix A: The White Paper Project

The Value of Penal Education

Abstract

Approximately 30% of the incarcerated population of a south-central prison system are not participating in the educational and vocational programs provided by the state. This white paper addresses issues with the lack of offender participation that ranged from problems such as poor training and management of the education and correctional staff to inadequate policies and programs affecting the entire prison system statewide. In order to study this phenomenon. By using interviews with 7 parolees who had served time on different prison units in a south-central state's prison system, I investigated the parolee's perceptions of the penal education program during incarceration and post-release. I was interested in how the parolees' experiences affected their self-motivation, self-esteem, and self-confidence and whether or not those experiences affected participation in the prison's education programs. The interviewees provided the in-sight and a plethora of rich data that was the basis of this paper. Analysis of the data resulted in findings that provided for two key recommendations for policy changes and staff improvements.

The Project Table of Contents

The Problem.....	148
Recommendations.....	160
Recommendation #1: Advanced Management and Supervisory Training for Education and Correctional Staff on Offender Management	167
Recommendation #2: Recommendations for Policy and Programs Changes Statewide.....	168
Conclusion	169
References.....	171

The Project List of Tables

Table A1. Demographics Table	149
Table A2. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 1	151
Table A3. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 2	153
Table A4. Findings and Recommendations Research Question 3	156
Table A5. Short Range Goals	163
Table A6. Long-Range Goals	165

The Problem

A study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of 7 parolees towards a south-central prison system's educational and vocational system. The purpose of the study was not only to investigate the perceptions of parolees but was also to examine the problem of low participation in those programs. The conceptual framework for the study was based on Albert Bandura's (1977) *theory of self-efficacy* to explore parolee perceptions of barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming during incarceration. I wanted to explore the psychological or emotional changes and the coping skills that resulted from the different parolee experiences then report those findings. I examined the experiences and perceptions of 7 parolees with the common experience of failing to participate in the prison education system during their initial prison terms. In addition, the exploratory design used in the study was chosen because using semistructured interviews produced rich data by allowing for probing and in-depth questioning, and allowed the participants to give detailed answers. The 7 parolees interviewed came from various prison units within the same state, were different genders, and possessed uniquely different characteristics. Demographic information (Table A1) has illustrated those characteristics.

Table A2*Demographic Information*

	Parolee						
	#0001	#0002	#0003	#0004	#0005	#0006	#0007
Male	X					X	X
Female		X	X	X	X		
Under 50 years old during incarceration	X	X		X	X		X
Over 50 years old during incarceration			X			X	
Served on multiple prison units	X	X	X			X	X
Served more than one prison term	X	X	X			X	X
Completed required non-education courses: Changes, Bridges to Life, Cognitive Intervention, etc.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Earned a GED or completed Basic Education classes during a later prison term							X
Completed educational or vocational class during a later prison term			X			X	X
Participated or completed PSCE courses during a later prison term						X	X
Received cases affected parole							
Served a total of 15 years or more in prison			X			X	
Served 5 years or less in prison		X		X	X		

Research Questions

Three research questions focused on parolee perceptions of the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational programming while incarcerated, strategies and supports the staff could have used to increase offender self-confidence and motivation to participate in the educational and vocational programs during incarceration, and how parolees at the study site described and internalized their experiences with the educational and vocational programs. Analysis of the data directed findings and recommendations is listed in the Findings and Recommendations (Tables A2-A4). Parolee interview data were analyzed to derive categories, themes, and meanings from which twelve themes emerged: threats of receiving major cases, necessity for non-education classes, additional education classes, long wait times before ability to attend classes, encouragement to attend classes from staff, self-motivation or motivation from friends and family to succeed, negative actions or comments from staff, one-on-one interaction with staff, need for better trained staff, staff should treat offenders more respectfully, nepotism among the staff, and feelings of being judged by the staff. This study provided the following recommendations: forming an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team, providing professional training for staff, policy changes to include an improved curriculum for all, cease hiring correctional staff as education instructors, and monitoring staff for inappropriate behaviors.

Table A2*Findings and Recommendations Research Question 1*

Results for Research Question 1: Barriers for enrollment and participation		
Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 1: The threat of receiving major cases (write-ups)</i>	Finding: All interviewees stated the threat of major cases was always present	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise without threats and intimidation
	Finding: Receiving major cases could result in denial of parole	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise without resulting to writing major cases as a management tool
<i>Theme 2: Non-education classes, i.e. Bridges to Life, Cognitive Intervention, Life Skills, etc.</i>	Finding: All participants completed all required non-education classes mandatory for parole eligibility	Recommendation: Set up a committee to examine and improve upon the course offerings
	Finding: Educational and vocational programing do not include other classes, such as parenting classes or classes preparing for family life	Recommendation: Include classes which are beneficial for releasees such as parenting classes, family life, budgeting, etc. which are necessary for everyday life experiences
<i>Theme 3: Education classes, i. e. GED, Basic Adult Education classes</i>	Finding: Offenders exceeding a certain age cannot participate in education or vocation classes	Recommendation: Education classes should be offered to all without regard to age

(table continues)

Finding: The current educational program has limited choices for both secondary and post-secondary opportunities

Recommendation: Expanding the education and vocation programs with more choices and a better curriculum

Finding: Currently, post-secondary education programs are not offered to parolees

Recommendation: Offer education and vocation classes post-release to parolees

Finding: Educational and vocational classes is a disqualifier for those with 6 months or left on their sentences

Recommendation: Include coursework that can be completed within 3-6 months

Theme 4: Long wait times before getting to the top of the list to attend classes

Finding: The wait time before beginning education and vocation classes could exceed 2 years

Recommendation: Shorten the wait time by allowing offenders with more than 6 months to participate in the education programing instead of only allowing long-termers with 2 or more years to participate

Table A3*Findings and Recommendations Research Question 2*

Results for Research Question 2: Strategies and supports of the Education Department and Administration		
Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 5: Encouragement from staff and administration to participate</i>	Finding: All eligible offenders are encouraged or mandated to sign up for education classes as needed	Recommendation: Have a focus group with known officers and staff who engage and encourage parolees to take classes to better understand the strategies they use to do so
<i>Theme 6: Some offenders had to motivate themselves to succeed or turn to other offenders in order to remain encouraged</i>	Finding: Many offenders relied on support from their families, friends, and themselves to remain motivated for success	Recommendation: Continue and encourage more family interaction by allowing special visitation on specific days for family counseling and interaction
	Finding: Some offenders turned to older or senior offenders for advice and guidance	Recommendation: Continue and strengthen peer-to-peer mentoring programs
<i>Theme 7: Negative actions or comments towards incarcerated people and revelations of personal information about the participant</i>	Finding: Staff and administrators were hindrances towards motivation due to negative feelings against incarcerated people were exhibited by maltreatment and verbal abuse	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and monitoring of staff for abusive maltreatment could alleviate this issue
	Finding: Staff and administrators were hindrances towards motivation due to exposing personal or restricted information publicly about the participant's crimes.	Recommendation: Unauthorized broadcasting of offender and parolee crimes is prohibited. Those who are caught abusing offenders or parolees with this violation should undergo disciplinary action

(table continues)

<i>Theme 8: One on one interaction with educators pushing the participant to succeed</i>	Finding: Offenders and parolees who were successful during later prison sentences reported one particular instructor took an interest in participant and pushed for the participant to complete education programs	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and special courses for diversity and sensitivity training could motivate other instructors to become motivators
		Recommendation: Creating a multi-agency coordination effort for the handling of offenders or others at risk of reoffending such as a team consisting of multiple local government agencies such as an Offender Management (IOM) works with the education and correction staff, and prison administration to help manage offenders at all levels
<i>Theme 9: The need for better trained and motivated education staff caused negative feelings</i>	Finding: Education staff were not always qualified to be instructors	Recommendation: Discontinue using unqualified correctional staff to fill in for trained educators
	Finding: Education staff would not always attend their classes or would resign due to fear of the prison environment	Recommendation: Hire and train educators and prepare them to teach in a prison setting. Require instructors attend the Correctional Officer Academy
	Finding: Education staff were poorly motivated to do the job	Recommendation: Retrain education staff with diversity training and annual refresher training similar to what correctional staff receive
<i>Theme 10: Treat offenders with more respect in order to be respected</i>	Finding: Supervising staff sometimes misused their authority to disrespect, threaten or coerce offenders	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and special courses for diversity and sensitivity training could motivate other instructors to become motivators

Table A4*Findings and Recommendations Research Question 3*

Results for Research Question 3: The internalized feelings of the parolees		
Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 11: Nepotism between education staff and the supervising staff caused feelings of anxiety among offenders</i>	Finding: The education staff would sometimes be former supervising officers, or the relatives of ranking supervisory staff.	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions.
	Finding: Because of nepotism, conflicts with the education staff could result in retaliation from the ranking supervisors.	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions. Any acts of retaliation by staff towards offenders or parolees should result in disciplinary action towards the violator
	Finding: Losing 'good time (extra time earned towards early release)', demotions in supervision class (maximum, medium, or minimum levels of supervision), ineligibility for parole, loss of privileges, and other restrictions could be the result of receiving major cases	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions. Suspicious write-ups should be investigated. Any acts of retaliation by staff towards offenders or parolees should result in disciplinary action towards the violator. Ensure offenders and parolees are not unjustly punished
<i>Theme 12: Feelings of being judged</i>	Finding: All participants reported feeling judged or looked down upon by correctional officers, teachers, or other staff	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise, manage, and control offenders and parolees, and include special courses for diversity and sensitivity training
	Finding: All participants reported feelings of poor treatment and were not valued or respected	

Findings Information

The information from these findings could provide information to prison administrators and lawmakers for developing new educational and vocational programs, courses, and non-educational classes that would benefit long-term and short-term offenders. The information could also be used to implement new policies and training that would benefit education and correctional staff in the management and supervision of offenders, as well as, motivate offenders to participate in the educational and vocational programs. The information could lead towards further studies that include offender successes or failures post release. Another benefit of this study may include program development for continued penal education for exoffenders and parolees. Studies have shown that education is a criminogenic need that can be met through educational and vocational programs (Baird, 2017; James, 2018). The addition of post penal education and training for parolees may be beneficial and further decrease reoffending, rearrests, and recidivism.

Background

Prison officials were concerned that lack of training and skills contributed to reoffending, rearrest, and recidivism as published in the 2019 statistical report by the study site. Many of its adult offenders possessed a 5.6th grade reading level of education (Gisi, 2018). The study site's school district confirmed that many new offenders enter the penal system with low self-esteem, low academic skills, and low academic successes. According to the school district's 2018 statistical report, the average age of offenders participating in academic programming was 32 years old with a history of academic

failures. The study site's school district provided educational and training programs such as the general education development (GED) test credential, literacy classes, welding, or other vocational skills classes. According to the study site's 2018 statistical report, an estimated 30% of the prison's population did not participate in the penal educational and vocational training programs. The low participation rate may have resulted in many offenders returning to their communities without the skills needed to obtain viable employment.

This study site's penal system contains one of the largest prison populations nationwide as reported in the state's 2018 statistical report, supporting 105 prison units that houses a daily average of 146,372 offenders, as well as, releasing thousands back into the communities annually. It was also reported that 30% of those releasees may not have received the educational or vocational skills necessary to be successful post-release since many of the releasees had not participated in the educational or vocational programs. According to the National Center for Education Research (NCER), (2018) 67% of exoffenders will be rearrested with 52% returning to prison; however, the greatest tool for fighting reoffending and recidivism is to increase the education level through vocational training skills or higher levels of academic education (Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2016; Scott, 2016).

Studies have shown that education lowers criminality through research into compulsory school leaving (CSL) laws. These laws mandate that certain age groups are to remain in school involuntarily. Adhering to these laws increases education and reduces crime (Bell et al., 2018). Studies have also shown that people with a post-secondary

education are less criminal minded. Education is the key to reducing crimes through incapacitation, with arrest rates lower as years pass (Bell et al., 2018).

Currently two theories reason why education and prison education is important: education increases employment opportunities and income, and younger people learn to be patient by attending school and place value on the future earning because of their educations. According to Hjalmarsson et al., (2018) further education causes a significant reduction in criminal activity in both genders and education has an impact across all crime categories. Policymakers could evaluate the benefits of increasing education in prisons to consider the value of non-pecuniary benefits such as crime reduction, increased employability, and better wages for exoffenders and parolees. By using education as a crime fighting tool, rearrests, recidivism, and reoffending may be reduced.

Recommendations

This exploratory qualitative research study was conducted by interviewing 7 parolees who had been incarcerated for a minimum of 2 years at a south-central state prison system. Details of the demographics for the participants are listed in Table 1. The participants were interviewed using sub-questions pertaining to the three research questions of their perceptions of the state's prison education system during their incarceration.

According to the parolees, the barriers associated with hindering participation in the educational and vocational programs were due to the parolees feeling devalued and that their voices went unheard by the administration and educational staff. All parolees felt that they were disrespected by the staff at various times during their incarcerations.

All parolees reported the staff expected to be respected at all times no matter what negative interactions may have transpired and some of the staff expected to be answered with “yes, sir”, “no, sir”, “yes, ma’am”, and ‘no, ma’am’. In the study participant #0006 stated,

They didn’t like where inmates would stick up for theyself [sic]. They think it’s supposed to be ‘yes, sir’, and, ‘no, sir’...naw...I’m a grown man like you is [are]. Imo [sic] respect you at your job capacity, but I’m not fixing to let you handle me in no kinda way because I’m incarcerated. It was all about respect thing.

Some parolees felt that they were being abused and mistreated with threats of documentation against them that would damage their chances of release to parole. When questioned on strategies, and supports could the education department and administration have taken to increase offender self-confidence and motivation, many parolees did not feel encouraged and were often discouraged to participate in the educational and vocational programs. Some parolees felt that retention of qualified instructors was a major contributing factor for non-participation. When asked to describe their internal feelings concerning their experiences with the state’s education system, some parolees felt threatened by the great degree of nepotism among the staff. Participant #0006 stated,

They got was a bunch of nepotism. You can’t get in trouble with one and expect for the other one not to get mad. You got a sergeant that’s seeing a sergeant. You got a lieutenant that her husband. So, if you have words with her, she go back to him and you got a major case.

The interpersonal relationships between staff members caused fears of retaliation actions from supervisory staff in cases of altercations with correctional and education staff. The results of these interviews lead to two recommendations: the need for advanced management and supervisory training for education and correctional staff, and recommendations for policy and program changes statewide in the state's prison system.

In order to implement these recommendations, short range goals (Table A5) and long-range goals (Table A6) have been developed. Additionally, short range and long-range goals provide the information for the methods to examine the effect of the goal and an estimated time interval to implement the goal. Developing goals divides a complex objective into several smaller ones and makes it more achievable, as well as establishes smaller milestones to keep the focus on the next target.

Table A5*Short Range Goals*

Short range goals		
Goal	Examination method	Time intervals
Forming a board to evaluate the recommendations suggested from the study	Using a Likert-style questionnaire format for staff and administrators	Three to 12 months
	Using on-line surveys for staff and parolees	
	Forming focus groups	
Advanced training from a professional group specializing in offender management and supervision such as the National Institute of Corrections	Monitoring staff, offender, and parolee interactions	Eighteen months to 2 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking uses of force against offenders and parolees	
	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders and parolees against staff	
	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders on offenders	
Increasing the education and vocation curriculum for offenders	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Eighteen months to 2 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee
Developing a committee of offender peer educators, officers, and education staff to work with offenders who	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Three to 12 months
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	

(table continues)

have educational difficulties issues	Monitoring staff, offender interactions	
Developing a committee of parolee peer educators, parole officers, and education staff to work with parolees who have comprehension issues	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Three to 12 months
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	

Table A6*Long-Range Goals*

Long-range goals		
Goal	Examination method	Time interval
Forming an Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team using multiple local government agencies together from statutory and non-criminal offices	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	Two to 3 years
	Monitoring staff, offender, and parolee interactions	
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking uses of force against offenders and parolees	
	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders and parolees against staff	
Development of post-release educational and vocational programs for parolees	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Two to 3 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee, and the curriculum would have to be developed
	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	
Policy and lawmakers examine the costs of implementing new policies and programs	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	Two to 3 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee, as well as pass in the state's legislative branch to authorize the spending
	Tracking and comparing the costs of the programs and policies to the projected benefits	

Recommendation #1

Advanced Management and Supervisory Training for Education and Correctional Staff on Offender Management

Studies have shown that the more support offered to offenders and ex-offenders, the lesser the chance of reoffending (O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). By increasing more advanced training for staff in the management and supervision of offenders, support is provided for the needs of offenders. Correctional and education staff would be able to engage positively, de-escalate potential altercations, and develop a more professional rapport with offenders and ex-offenders, including those under mandatory supervision, probation, and parole. Advanced training could create an atmosphere of rehabilitation, education and work which would promote life skills rather than allowing criminal attitudes and subcultures to dominate (Maguire & Raynor, 2017). The National Institute of Corrections has provided information and assistance for direct supervision strategies for offender management, including training for administration, first-line supervisors, and housing unit officers (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). Progress of the training could be measured by monitoring the numbers of disciplinary reports written and levels of aggression and negative incidents. This support would continue as an 'exit strategy' for those higher risk offenders post release in an effort to discourage criminal activity (O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). Parolees and parole officers would benefit from advanced staff training as a method of enhancing teamwork between the parolee and the parole officer during the period of supervision.

Recommendation #2

Recommendations for Policy and Programs Changes Statewide

One program that could benefit not only this south-central state's prison unit, but other state and local agencies, could be the implementation of Integrated Offender Management (IOM). This strategy was developed in 2009 created a multi-agency coordination effort for the handling of offenders or others at risk of reoffending (O'Hagan & Elliott, 2018). The purpose is to bring multiple local government agencies together from statutory and non-criminal offices such as the police, local authorities, national health services (NHS), probation services, parole offices, prisons, jails, youth offender services, and organizations from within the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Studies have shown that continuity of case management is critical for the continued rehabilitation of Exoffenders and parolees (Maguire & Raynor, 2017). Programs and policies must be in place to counteract at-risk releasees.

Another program that could benefit parolees would be the development of post-release educational and vocational programs. Policy and lawmakers could examine the costs of implementing new policies and programs, while comparing the costs to the projected benefits. A study was conducted in Indiana by American Institutes for Research which resulted in the findings that by reducing the recidivism rate by 1% \$1.5 million would be saved by the state and taxpayers (Jarjoura, 2019). Post release education is the key to the recidivism reduction by using funding through such sources as the Second Chance Pell program. According to Jarjoura (2019) releasees who participate in the penal education programs are different from other offenders, in that, those releasees are

transformed in their self-perceptions. Those releasees are committed to turning their lives around and to stop committing crimes. Education is a determining factor in those life style turn-arounds (Jarjoura, 2019).

Conclusion

Nationwide, prison education is conducted in all states. A study of the education system in a south-central state revealed that though the prisons offer educational and vocational programming, 30% of its eligible offenders are not participating. Interviews explored the perceptions of 7 parolees of different ages and genders. After analyzing the data, the following two recommendations resulted: the need for advanced management and supervisory training for education and correctional staff, and recommendations for policy and program changes statewide in the state's prison system.

The first recommendation can be resolved through more advanced training of education and correctional staff. The results of the effectiveness of the training could be measured by monitoring the numbers of disciplinary actions taken against offenders and the number of negative altercations between staff and offenders. Offenders are assigned as peer educators to tutor or aid the instructors with coursework. Developing a committee of offender peer educators, officers, and education staff could aid in resolving problems with participating offenders who may have comprehension issues. Participant #6 of the study reported,

It was some classes where some of them dudes, some of the things they couldn't comprehend. Like, I'd be walking through the hall and I stop in the classroom and one of the teachers would call me in there to explain

such and such. I would break it down and explain. You gotta know how to absorb the knowledge that's being given to you. Also, you communicate with administration that's the only way you gonna get something done. If you don't communicate with the administration, they don't know what you want.

Post release, training of parole officers and other supervisors could be measured by the levels of recidivism, rearrests, and reoffending as these factors may be direct reflections of the professional rapport and teamwork between the releasees and their supervisors.

The second recommendation is a blueprint the policymakers and lawmakers could use as a basis to implement policy changes towards developing new educational and vocational programs for offenders and releasees. Other programs could involve developing an IOM plan to include numerous agencies. According to O'Hagan and Elliot (2018) developing an IOM team may meet with challenges when attempting to gain support from other agencies within the VCS. All agencies must commit to support the principles of the IOM. Communication is the key to implanting new policies, programs and training.

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Appendix B: Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions

What did parolees perceive to be the barriers for enrollment and participation in education and vocational when they were incarcerated?

What strategies, and supports could the education department and administration have taken to increase their self-confidence and motivation to use the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

Interview Questions

- a. Can you describe some of your experiences with the educational programs while you were incarcerated?
- b. What were some other classes or programs could have been available to encourage you to participate in education and vocational programs?
- c. What do you think administrators could have done to encourage you to participate in the educational and vocational programs?
- d. Can you give some examples of why or what made it difficult for you to participate in education or vocation programs?
- e. Looking back now, what do you wish you had done differently and why?
- f. If you found the coursework may have been difficult, what do you think could have been done to raise your confidence if you participated in a difficult course or class?
- g. What were some factors which could have motivated you to participate in the PSCE education programs?

a. What were some of the actions the education department staff or administration took to increase your self-confidence to participate in educational and vocational programs?

(table continues)

How do parolees at the state penitentiary describe and internalize their experiences with the educational and vocational programs while incarcerated?

b. Can you list some actions education department and administration staff took causing you to lose motivation or self-confidence for participation in educational and vocational programs?

c. Can you describe your experiences when speaking one-on-one with education department and administration staff concerning your participation in educational and vocational programming?

a. Can you describe your experiences causing you to discontinue or opt out of educational and vocational programs after you had agreed to participate?

b. Describe any negative incidents causing you to opt out of participating in educational or vocational programs.

Appendix C: Interview Guide Script

Beginning of Interview

Good morning, Mr. _____, my name is Deb Johnson. I am a Doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a study on parolee's opinions and perceptions on the prison education system at _____ jails and penitentiaries. This study is strictly voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to or makes you uncomfortable. If you have questions for me, ask at any time. As you read on the Consent form, you have the contact information for my instructor and the University.

I appreciate you for participating in my study and your answers are important to me. Your opinions may be valuable later to make changes to the education system. You will receive a summary of this interview to review and you can contact me in 10 days if I need to make corrections or else, I will continue forward. No one will know your name or anything about you concerning this study since I will be the only person handling this interview information. Do you mind if I record this interview and take notes for accuracy? The interview shouldn't take too long do you have 30 or 40 minutes? Do you have any questions for me? Are you ready to get started?

The study revolves around three research questions. Those are: what do you perceive to be the barriers for enrollment and participation in educational and vocational when you were incarcerated, what strategies and supports could the education department and administration have taken to increase your self-confidence and motivation to use the educational and vocational programs, and if you had internalized feelings, can you

describe your experiences with the educational and vocational programs during your incarceration?

(Begin research and interview questions)

End of Interview

That's all I have. Do you have questions for me? Remember, I'll send you a summary of what we talked about today. You look it over. If I hear back from you, it would be great. If you have some corrections, you want me to make would be the time to do it, if I don't hear back from you in a week or two then I will assume what I wrote was accurate, it's a 'go' and I'll be able to use your information in the study.

Thank you for your time. Remember you will receive a summary of the study. If you need to contact me, my contact information is at the bottom of the Consent form.

Appendix D: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 1

Results for Research Question 1: Barriers for enrollment and participation

Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 1: The threat of receiving major cases (write-ups)</i>	Finding: All interviewees stated the threat of major cases was always present	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise without threats and intimidation
	Finding: Receiving major cases could result in denial of parole	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise without resulting to writing major cases as a management tool
<i>Theme 2: Non-education classes, i.e. Bridges to Life, Cognitive Intervention, Life Skills, etc.</i>	Finding: All participants completed all required non-education classes mandatory for parole eligibility	Recommendation: Set up a committee to examine and improve upon the course offerings

(table continues)

	Finding: Educational and vocational programming do not include other classes, such as parenting classes or classes preparing for family life	Recommendation: Include classes which are beneficial for releasees such as parenting classes, family life, budgeting, etc. which are necessary for everyday life experiences
<i>Theme 3: Education classes, i. e. GED, Basic Adult Education classes</i>	Finding: Offenders exceeding a certain age cannot participate in education or vocation classes	Recommendation: Education classes should be offered to all without regard to age
	Finding: The current educational program has limited choices for both secondary and post-secondary opportunities	Recommendation: Expanding the education and vocation programs with more choices and a better curriculum
	Finding: Currently, post-secondary education programs are not offered to parolees	Recommendation: Offer education and vocation classes post-release to parolees
	Finding: Educational and vocational classes is a disqualifier for those with 6 months or left on their sentences	Recommendation: Include coursework that can be completed within 3-6 months
<i>Theme 4: Long wait times before getting to the top of the list to attend classes</i>	Finding: The wait time before beginning education and vocation classes could exceed 2 years	Recommendation: Shorten the wait time by allowing offenders with more than 6 months to participate in the education programming instead of only allowing long-termers with 2 or more years to participate

Appendix E: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 2

Results for Research Question 2: Strategies and supports of the Education Department and Administration		
Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 5: Encouragement from staff and administration to participate</i>	Finding: All eligible offenders are encouraged or mandated to sign up for education classes as needed	Recommendation: Have a focus group with known officers and staff who engage and encourage parolees to take classes to better understand the strategies they use to do so
<i>Theme 6: Some offenders had to motivate themselves to succeed or turn to other offenders in order to remain encouraged</i>	Finding: Many offenders relied on support from their families, friends, and themselves to remain motivated for success	Recommendation: Continue and encourage more family interaction by allowing special visitation on specific days for family counseling and interaction
	Finding: Some offenders turned to older or senior offenders for advice and guidance	Recommendation: Continue and strengthen peer-to-peer mentoring programs
<i>Theme 7: Negative actions or comments towards incarcerated people and revelations of personal information about the participant</i>	Finding: Staff and administrators were hindrances towards motivation due to negative feelings against incarcerated people were exhibited by maltreatment and verbal abuse	Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and monitoring of staff for abusive maltreatment could alleviate this issue

(table continues)

	<p>Finding: Staff and administrators were hindrances towards motivation due to exposing personal or restricted information publicly about the participant's crimes.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Unauthorized broadcasting of offender and parolee crimes is prohibited. Those who are caught abusing offenders or parolees with this violation should undergo disciplinary action</p>
<p><i>Theme 8: One on one interaction with educators pushing the participant to succeed</i></p>	<p>Finding: Offenders and parolees who were successful during later prison sentences reported one particular instructor took an interest in participant and pushed for the participant to complete education programs</p>	<p>Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and special courses for diversity and sensitivity training could motivate other instructors to become motivators</p>
		<p>Recommendation: Creating a multi-agency coordination effort for the handling of offenders or others at risk of reoffending such as a team consisting of multiple local government agencies such as an Offender Management (IOM) works with the education and correction staff, and prison administration to help manage offenders at all levels</p>
<p><i>Theme 9: The need for better trained and motivated education staff caused negative feelings</i></p>	<p>Finding: Education staff were not always qualified to be instructors</p>	<p>Recommendation: Discontinue using unqualified correctional staff to fill in for trained educators</p>

(table continues)

Finding: Education staff would not always attend their classes or would resign due to fear of the prison environment

Recommendation: Hire and train educators and prepare them to teach in a prison setting. Require instructors attend the Correctional Officer Academy

Finding: Education staff were poorly motivated to do the job

Recommendation: Retrain education staff with diversity training and annual refresher training similar to what correctional staff receive

Theme 10: Treat offenders with more respect in order to be respected

Finding: Supervising staff sometimes misused their authority to disrespect, threaten or coerce offenders

Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections and special courses for diversity and sensitivity training could motivate other instructors to become motivators

Appendix F: Findings and Recommendations Research Question 3

Results for Research Question 3: The internalized feelings of the parolees		
Theme	Finding	Recommendation
<i>Theme 11: Nepotism between education staff and the supervising staff caused feelings of anxiety among offenders</i>	Finding: The education staff would sometimes be former supervising officers, or the relatives of ranking supervisory staff.	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions.
	Finding: Because of nepotism, conflicts with the education staff could result in retaliation from the ranking supervisors.	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions. Any acts of retaliation by staff towards offenders or parolees should result in disciplinary action towards the violator
	Finding: Losing ‘good time (extra time earned towards early release)’, demotions in supervision class (maximum, medium, or minimum levels of supervision), ineligibility for parole, loss of privileges, and other restrictions could be the result of receiving major cases	Recommendation: Cease allowing or hiring relatives or correctional staff in education staff positions. Suspicious write-ups should be investigated. Any acts of retaliation by staff towards offenders or parolees should result in disciplinary action towards the violator. Ensure offenders and parolees are not unjustly punished

(table continues)

*Theme 12: Feelings of
being judged*

Finding: All participants reported feeling judged or looked down upon by correctional officers, teachers, or other staff

Finding: All participants reported feelings of poor treatment and were not valued or respected

Recommendation: Training in offender and parole supervision and management from a professional source such as the National Institute of Corrections could teach staff how to supervise, manage, and control offenders and parolees, and include special courses for diversity and sensitivity training

Appendix G: Short Range Goals

Short range goals		
Goal	Examination method	Time intervals
Forming a board to evaluate the recommendations suggested from the study	Using a Likert-style questionnaire format for staff and administrators	Three to 12 months
	Using on-line surveys for staff and parolees	
	Forming focus groups	
Advanced training from a professional group specializing in offender management and supervision such as the National Institute of Corrections	Monitoring staff, offender, and parolee interactions	Eighteen months to 2 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking uses of force against offenders and parolees	
	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders and parolees against staff	
Increasing the education and vocation curriculum for offenders	Tracking number of violent altercations of offenders on offenders	Eighteen months to 2 years because this training program would have to pass the Budget committee
	Tracking participation rates in the programs	

(table continues)

Developing a committee of offender peer educators, officers, and education staff to work with offenders who have educational difficulties issues	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Three to 12 months
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Monitoring staff, offender interactions	
Developing a committee of parolee peer educators, parole officers, and education staff to work with parolees who have comprehension issues	Tracking participation rates in the programs	Three to 12 months
	Tracking disciplinary violations written by staff	
	Tracking recidivism, reoffending, and rearrest rates of parolees	