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Educators' Perspectives Regarding the Influence of Prison Education Programs on Recidivism

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2019

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Abstract

Several factors impact whether inmates are successful upon release. Lack of education and job skills are critical reasons for unsuccessful reintegration. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Cloward and Ohlin's opportunity theory provided the framework for the study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with eight prison educators. Results of axial coding and thematic analysis resulted in four themes: time commitment, access to programs, negative interaction, and incentives. Findings indicated that from the educator's perspective, inmates who were motivated and participated in educational programs had more success reintegrating into society upon release and less chance of recidivism. Reducing recidivism through prison education programs advances the betterment of society. Prison education programs improve society by fostering opportunities to create a positive social change and help former inmates become productive community members upon release. Education can be a gateway to social and economic mobility. Prison education programs are a cost-effective way of reducing crime, which leads to long-term benefits for society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs from the prison educator's perspective. Ex-offenders are confronted with challenges that impede successful reintegration into society (Baranger et al., 2018). Lack of education and job skills are at the forefront of this issue. Education programs can play a critical role in the successful reentry of individuals returning home from incarceration. A growing body of research has shown a link between education programs, decreased recidivism rates, and positive employment outcomes (Mohammed & Mohamed, 2015). The scholarly community does not know the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Reducing recidivism through prison education programs advances the betterment of society by providing opportunities to inmates to make a positive change in their lives to become productive members of the community upon release. Education can be a gateway to social and economic mobility. Prison education programs are a cost-effective way to reduce crime, which leads to long-term benefits for society.

Background

Crime has been a social problem for as long as anyone can recall. Erskine (1974) offered information related to earlier views regarding the causes of crime, which could be beneficial in comparing how societal views may have changed over time. Interviews in a nationwide cross-section of adults were conducted, which consisted of questions that referred only to reactions of feelings towards crime. The data from the polls and the

interviews allowed for a determination of what society previously viewed as the most significant reason that crime existed. Surprisingly, only a third of the sample population held the criminal responsible for their actions, and 60% passed the blame to the pressures of society. Poor home environment and lack of parental support were the most significant factors that were concluded to cause crimes. At the time of the current study, education and substance abuse were not important contributing factors associated with crime (see Erskine, 1974). These factors do not appear to be the recent consensus.

The United States is home to the world's most extensive correctional system, where most released ex-convicts reoffend. Education is the most potent predictor of recidivism, and access to educational programs may profoundly impact an inmate's success upon societal reentry. Not only does correctional education benefit inmates, but it also benefits their families and society as a whole by reducing recidivism. Previous research has shown that education is the primary stabilizing agent in the lives of inmates upon return to society because it leads to an appreciation for learning and stable employment (Tietjen et al., 2018). Higher education has recently received political attention. Former President Obama began reinstating access to Pell Grants to inmates because there is a potential gain for society in reducing recidivism (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

There are many social and personal benefits of vocational and higher education in prison, leading to a productive, positive lifestyle and reducing recidivism. Previous studies have supported the positive correlation between prison education programs and increased opportunities postrelease through the perceptions of ex-inmates and prison

educators involved in prison education programs (Baranger et al., 2018). Participation in prison education programs can increase motivation for other life goals. Nonetheless, education is not the only answer to successful reentry into the community. Tools to connect with housing, mental health supports, employment, and social supports are viewed as equally important.

Theories have evolved surrounding the social and personal benefits of prison education. The first was that if inmates earned a degree or certificate, employers would be more likely to hire them because they appeared to be more focused on changing their lifestyles. The second theory was that human capital offered to the employer increases significantly with educational history or a certificate. These theories suggested that transition back into the community and decreasing ex-inmate's chances of returning to prison are impacted by education and vocational trade during incarceration (Baranger et al., 2018; Mohammed & Mohamed, 2015).

The data gathered from these studies suggested that those who participate in educational programs see a reduction in criminal behavior and increased self-perception. Among the 1,800 prisoners who had returned to custody within 3 years of release, 32% did not participate in educational or training programs. The findings supported the premise that receiving correctional education while incarcerated can significantly reduce the risks of recidivism. These characteristics are essential to identify as they can lead to a more productive and positive lifestyle, reducing recidivism (Baranger et al., 2018; Mohammed & Mohamed, 2015).

Although there are proven benefits for inmates to participate in prison education programs, there is still a lack of participation. To explore the reasons for participation or lack thereof, Roth and Manger (2014) revealed that motives, such as building competence, social causes, escape, and future planning, were meaningful in increasing the percentage of inmates who participate in educational programming. Previous incarceration, sentence length, and sentence served influence such motives. Additionally, variables, such as the subjects' socioeconomic background, type of crime, drug problems, and information about mental disorders, could play a role in participation.

Furthermore, Runell (2016) discovered how difficult prison education could be, mainly when complex encounters occur. Prison education has many complexities; however, exploration of how to increase participation can be beneficial to prison systems and the community because it may provide further understanding as to why prison education programs lack participation (Runell, 2016). Runell further supported the difficulties between adult learning and prison education or education upon reentry to the community.

Tietjen et al. (2018) demonstrated how social engagement could impact participation rates in prison education programs. In addition to the previously discovered motives, a significant predictor for enrollment for men was whether they enrolled in Bible study and assistance groups. For women, being enrolled in parenting groups was a significant predictor of educational enrollment.

Prison education has myriad benefits to inmates. College education has been proven effective in assisting inmates in adjusting to society (Tietjen et al., 2018).

Education increases good behavior and reduces their chances of a return to prison. For these reasons, identifying predictors of educational attainment is critical.

Not only do prison education programs equip inmates with skills and opportunities upon release, but they can also have a positive impact on inmate conduct. Inmates' participation in prison education does impact committing infractions; however, the positive impact appears dependent on the type of educational program and whether students completed the program. Also, those who participated in these programs had a better understanding of hard work and life skills (Clark & Rydberg, 2016; Miner-Romanoff, 2016; Tietjen, 2009).

Further exploration in increasing positive inmate conduct through the prison education program can be helpful for multiple reasons. One reason is that if an inmate shows misconduct while incarcerated, this is a valuable proxy for the likelihood that they will offend or reoffend in the community. Additionally, misconduct can result in detrimental consequences, such as safety threats to inmates and staff, sentence extensions, and monetary loss, which cause a strain on institutions. If inmates' participation in educational programs could improve their behavior and reduce their recidivism rates, then further examination of the motivating factors for participation could be beneficial (Clark & Rydberg, 2016).

There are many different types of educational programs offered by institutions, one being art programs. Art programs for inmates potentially reduce not only behavior problems while incarcerated, but recidivism rates (Miner-Romanoff, 2016). Additionally, these programs increased positive personal and social identifiers and directly correlated

with desistance from crime. Opportunities for these types of educational programs afford inmates an acceptable way to express potentially destructive feelings. Increased self-efficacy, confidence, and self-esteem proved to be positive outcomes of the art program (Miner-Romanoff, 2016). In turn, these outcomes can reduce criminogenic risks.

The consequences that accompany a criminal conviction extend far beyond incarceration. Self-stigmatization can manifest in low self-esteem, as well as decreased personal boundaries to reentry (Evans et al., 2018). The postconviction release is accompanied by setbacks, with or without educational skills as a tool. There are consequences of incarceration long after release, including psychological effects, such as hopelessness, low self-esteem, and feeling less than others. There is also a negative stigma in society. However, higher education while incarcerated attenuates self-stigma and is empowering.

Once individuals are convicted, regardless of time served, society tends to reduce the social opportunities of a person with a conviction (Evans et al., 2018; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). This conviction often becomes a salient characteristic of who they are and affects interactions that may otherwise have not been an issue. This self-stigma many times prevents these ex-inmates from pursuing their goals and even becomes a label turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once labeled, these individuals can find it suitable to act in a manner that is consistent with this label. Higher education was a milestone determined to mean as much to prisoners as other life events, such as employment, having families, and marriage. Those who engage in prison education positively impact not only themselves but the community. These are critical reasons why

society must learn to accept the time served and forgo the reduction of social opportunities of these individuals.

Further exploration surrounding participation, motivation, and completion of prison education programs to reduce recidivism could benefit all stakeholders. Inmates are a vulnerable prison population (Keen & Woods, 2016). Therefore, interviews with those who work closest to them in the classrooms could provide detailed insight. Nonetheless, the relationship between these prison educators and inmates is not always cohesive. When inmates respected educators as a role model or counselor and their educators, transformative learning occurred. Even when there is a desire to learn, these inmates are often accompanied by a sense of failure from previous school experiences. They are under watch and often forced to participate, and the program funding is often questioned.

Long gaps in education and psychological issues are just a few of the challenges inmates face when considering prison education programs. These obstacles may cause inmates to question the value of the program. The past experiences of these inmates may cause them to distrust others, even educational instructors. Therefore, prison educators have to be well prepared to make a difference in the lives of these individuals, despite their circumstances, which can have a positive impact on society as a whole. Interviews with prison educators could be a lifeline to understanding and reaching a vulnerable, less studied population (Keen & Woods, 2016; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017).

Educational programs within prisons provide inmates with opportunities to learn valuable skills and keep them engaged in activities. Remaining focused on positive

activities for hours each week allows less time to get in trouble and provides the inmates with normalcy. By participating in educational programming, inmates experience a sense of participating in an activity like they would in the outside world. Keeping inmates involved with like-minded individuals who are also constructive is likely to discourage them from involvement with antisocial peers. The development of these social, cognitive, and practical skills obtained through participating in prison education programs addresses many criminogenic needs of the rehabilitation process (Clark & Rydberg, 2016). Additionally, quality correctional education has revealed a reduction in recidivism rates. By reducing recidivism, correctional education can save taxpayers money and create safer communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

According to Walden University (2013), social change is a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies. Social change improves both human and social conditions. The study topic of reducing recidivism through prison education programs may advance the betterment of society. Prison education programs may better the community by providing opportunities to inmates to make positive changes in their lives. Upon release, inmates have the chance to become productive members of society. Education can be a gateway to social and economic mobility. Prison education programs are a cost-effective way to reduce crime, which leads to long-term benefits for society (Bender, 2018).

Although prison education programs require funding up front, there are considerable long-term economic benefits. For example, taxpayers will end up saving 4

to 5 dollars for every dollar spent on prison education. These educational programs also allow inmates to become competitive within the job market, which will spur economic activity (RAND, 2018). Additionally, providing these inmates with the tools to become productive members of society will decrease the chances that they will depend on government programs upon release (Bender, 2018). These are the reasons that the potential findings of my study topic might contribute to positive social change.

Problem Statement

A significant number of inmates are released from prison every year. Many reintegrate into society, reconnect with their families, and find employment. Conversely, a large number of ex-convicts face significant challenges that lead them to reoffend (Baranger et al., 2018). Several factors impact whether inmates are successful upon release. According to RAND (2019), lack of education and job skills are important reasons for unsuccessful reintegration. The scholarly community does not know the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs.

Research suggested that little has been done to address the concerns associated with prison education programs. Inmates who participate in correctional education programs have a 43% lower chance of returning to prison (Bidwell, 2013). Many prisons have programs that target educational and skill development, yet there is no real commitment to the programs. Current research suggested that some prisons have educational programs and policies in place, but not all prisons actively operate many

programs (Mohammed & Mohamed, 2015). It is evident through these findings that prison education is a low priority in many institutions.

I identified a gap through the literature review regarding prison education programs, such as motives for participation, which could impact recidivism rates. This lack of previous studies was evident due to the few articles found and the suggestions for continued research in the literature. The prison systems could better address deficit areas by having more information regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. In return, the participation levels could increase, which could decrease recidivism.

Another limitation to these previous studies was that researchers had looked at the impact of educational programs upon recidivism; however, measuring success was not addressed. For example, just because an inmate finds a job upon release does not necessarily indicate success. Instead, other factors, such as inmates' ability to keep a job for a certain amount of time and not reoffend, should also be investigated. How recidivism is measured is a gap in the literature.

The educational and career development of inmates is not widely accepted as a remedy to recidivism. There is also a persistent gap in the literature regarding the idea of offender rehabilitation centers reducing recidivism. This information warranted a stronger emphasis on career development research in corrections. Information could be beneficial in demonstrating prison education's effectiveness in reducing recidivism and improving the futures of ex-offenders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Exploring educators' perceptions allowed me to gain further insight into how prison educators interpret inmate participation and motivation. Exploring educators' observations provided information regarding the positive impacts of prison education. The study approach was qualitative and included interviews with prison educators.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs?

RQ2: What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study was based on Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory. The opportunity theory is a structural theory that refers to the midrange level of society, including the institutional level. This theory addresses the impact of a lack of opportunities on forming a criminal subculture (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Concepts explored in the current study included whether a lack of opportunities, including social, economic, or educational, impacts the criminal subculture. The opportunity theory offered guidance on reducing recidivism through educational programming, and provided further insight into the challenges associated with the opportunities available to inmates.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. I conducted individual interviews with prison educators. Personal interviews are a valuable technique used to explore a person's perception of a given phenomenon, thereby contributing to in-depth data collection (Frances et al., 2009). Focusing on creating additional opportunities geared toward success should be consistent with Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory because lack of education and job skills are key factors in recidivism (RAND, 2018). Qualitative methodology was consistent with exploring how increasing inmate participation and motivation in educational programs may reduce their chances to reoffend, which was the focus of this study.

Definitions

Correctional education programs: Educational programs available to men and women under correctional supervision. The types of programs range from basic skills training to college and vocational training that provide the skills necessary for people to obtain employment upon release (Counsel of State Governments, 2020).

Incarceration: The state of being imprisoned or confined in various types of institutions (U.S. Legal, 2021a).

Observation: The action or process of observing something or someone or gaining information.

Offender, *prisoner*, and *convict*: A defendant in a criminal case or a person convicted of a crime (U.S. Legal, 2021b).

Perceptions: Ways of understanding or interpreting something, a mental impression, or seeing a situation from one's perspective.

Recidivism: Criminal acts that resulted in rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during 3 years following the prisoner's release (National Institute of Justice, 2020).

Recidivism rate: The relative number of prisoners who return to prison or jail after being released because they have committed another crime (U.S. Legal, 2021c).

Assumptions

I assumed that prison educators would have insight into inmates' participation and motivation in prison education programs. Furthermore, I assumed that participants would provide valuable insights regarding motivational factors that may increase inmates' participation and development of job skills to be successful upon release.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmates' participation and motivation in educational programs. The scope consisted of 12 to 15 current or past prison educators. Delimitations included educators who had taught for at least 2 years in a prison setting. I used a thick description of data to show that the study's findings could apply to other contexts, circumstances, and situations to address potential transferability. The results of this study may be transferable to prison education programs across states.

Limitations

Phenomenological studies require an understanding of broad philosophical assumptions that should be identified by the researcher (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher should choose participants who have experienced the phenomenon to explore common understandings further. A limitation in the current study could have been recruiting prison educators who might not want their employer to be aware of their participation in the study. To offset this barrier, I contacted participants through familiar friends who could deliver a participation letter and informed consent. If the educator chose to participate, they could reach out to me. Additionally, interviewing former prison educators was another option.

Educator bias may have been a limitation in this study, considering multiple variables, such as burnout, jaded to the system, or negative attitudes. Perceptions of prison educators may have been biased because their situation was viewed from their perspective, which may have been skewed with emotions and thoughts. Bias was offset by asking prison educators to describe things for what they are, without any hype, feelings, or biases. I was vigilant in both verbal and nonverbal communication during the interviews to avoid this particular limitation.

Another barrier was the stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic. These orders allowed only essential travel and work. It was uncertain whether nonessential gatherings could take place. Therefore, I considered alternative interview options, such as Zoom or phone interviews.

Significance

I explored prison educators' perceptions of inmate participation and motivation in educational programs. This study was unique because previous studies had not focused on why inmates are not taking advantage of educational programs. The results of this study may provide prison education systems with valuable information regarding factors to increase participation and motivation. By increasing participation rates and affording inmates additional opportunities through instilling education and job skills, post-release outcomes could be more positive. Bringing awareness to prison education programs and their impact on reducing recidivism could contribute to positive social change if society understood that inmates want to become productive members of society.

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of this study, the influence of prison education programs on recidivism. The background suggested that incarceration is a temporary solution for societal problems. I identified the purpose of this study and discussed the opportunity theory and qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. In Chapter 2, I review the literature related to educating inmates to help them become more productive members of society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A significant number of inmates are released from prison every year. Many reintegrate into society, reconnect with their families, and find employment. Conversely, many ex-convicts face significant challenges that lead them to reoffend (Baranger et al., 2018). Several factors impact whether inmates are successful upon release. According to RAND (2018), lack of education and job skills are critical reasons for unsuccessful reintegration. The scholarly community does not know the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs.

I explored the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Previous research suggested that educational achievement provides inmates with increased opportunities postrelease (Baranger et al., 2018). The current study was necessary to understand factors to increase participation and motivation in prison educational programs. I used a qualitative approach and phenomenological design to conduct interviews with prison educators.

In Chapter 2, I examine the characteristics of prison education, such as educational options, benefits, successful programs, obstacles to academic success, learning styles, motivating factors, and the role of the prison educator, which potentially impact recidivism rates. The opportunity theory and qualitative approach with a phenomenological design are discussed, which provided the framework for the research questions. The literature review related to key variables and key concepts provides a synthesis of preceding literature, and I close the chapter with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy included multiple sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, published books, and scholarly website publications. The keywords used to locate this literature were *crime and **education** level*, *recidivism rates* and *education*, *crime* and *lack of education*, *prison education* or *trade*, *education* not *trade*, *incarceration* and *adult learning*, and *programs for incarcerated adults*. Databases and search engines explored encompassed Criminal Justice and Criminological Highlights, Science Direct, Education Source, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and the Thoreau Multi-Database.

Conceptual Foundation

I based the framework for this study on Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory. The opportunity theory is a structural theory that refers to the midrange level of society, including the institutional level. This theory addresses the impact that a lack of opportunities has on forming a criminal subculture (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). U.S. culture advances the notion that hard work pays off. Conversely, Cloward and Ohlin noted that this is not always the case.

Despite how hard one might work or desire to work hard, opportunities are not always equally present. School systems struggle to provide equal education, jobs are scarce, and upbringings are unequal. Those who find themselves at a disadvantage often turn to a life of delinquency to meet their needs. The opportunity theory was appropriate to explore participation and motivation in prison education programs because not all inmates are afforded equal educational opportunities while incarcerated. Concepts

explored included whether a lack of opportunities, including social, economic, or educational, impacts the criminal subculture. The opportunity theory offered guidance on reducing recidivism through educational programming, allowing further insight into the challenges associated with the lack of opportunities available to inmates upon release.

Literature Review

Education was not introduced in the United States prison system as a form of rehabilitation until 1798. Toward the end of the 18th century, harsh punishment was eradicated by the law, and educators began to make efforts to rehabilitate offenders through education (Teeters, 1955). Before this reform, prisoners endured severe and inhumane punishment. The thought process was that this type of punishment would dissuade individuals from a criminal lifestyle (Reagan & Stroughton, 1976).

The initial objectives of prisons were to reform prisoners, ensure public safety, and offer humanity (Teeters, 1955). Seven years after the first prison was constructed in Philadelphia, a school was added to the prison to teach inmates how to learn basic academic skills. Educators fought to rehabilitate inmates through education for the next several decades because they saw the value of education for society.

MacCormick (date, as cited in Hunsinger, 1997) completed a study that provided a detailed blueprint for educating prisoners. MacCormick, Assistant Director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, went undercover as an inmate to observe life in prison. His experience enabled him to create a model regarding effective prison education programs. This covert operation prompted a nationwide focus on correctional education and led to formation of the Correctional Education Association (CEA) in the 1930s (Hunsinger, 1997). The CEA

comprises educators and administrators who focus their work on correctional education. The CEA provides critical training, valuable networking, and cutting-edge research, which allow practical and life-changing education for incarcerated individuals. This organization ensures that facilities stay informed about educational practices and deliver quality education to assist inmates in achieving academic success (CEA, 2020).

Each year, a substantial number of inmates are released back into society in hopes that they will not return. According to Bender (2018), approximately 41% of the prison population does not have a high school diploma. Similarly, only 24% of the incarcerated population has received any postsecondary education. Research indicated that incarcerated individuals are far less educated than the general population. Inmates generally have lower basic skills, which negatively impacts their everyday demands of life and employment. Inmates also have higher unemployment rates or underemployment (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This lack of education and job skills is significant, considering that 95% of inmates are eventually released. Many jobs require some level of skill, whether it is a certification or postsecondary education. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the capacity for ex-inmates to gain employment postconviction is lower than that for individuals who have not been incarcerated. Lack of educational attainment while confined contributes to relapse into criminal activity because these individuals cannot compete in the job market.

While incarcerated, inmates are provided with opportunities to improve their chances of becoming productive members of society upon release. One opportunity is education, whether academic or vocational. According to national research, both

educational and vocational prison programs significantly reduce the chance of prisoners

reoffending upon release. Davis et al. (2013) found that participation in high school or

general equivalency diploma (GED) programs was the most common approach to

education, as many inmates enter prison without completing high school. Inmates who

completed their GED had a 30% lower chance of recidivism. The effects of

postsecondary education or vocational training could not be disentangled because inmates

often participate in multiple programs (Davis et al., 2013).

The concern for inhumane treatment of incarcerated individuals resulted in prison

reform. Education was at the forefront of reform and brought promise to transform

inmates into productive members of society. Various studies have shown that correctional

education offers many benefits to both inmates and prison systems when good programs

are implemented. Regardless of these findings, prison education programs are provided to

only a small percentage of the inmate population. Furthermore, there are several

shortcomings of the programs that do exist, which limit their effectiveness in reducing

recidivism rates. The educational programs need improvement to increase inmate

participation rates and motivation (Bender, 2018; Prison Studies Project, 2020). Prison

education programs are crucial for an inmate's rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Rationale for Educational Prison Programs

Previous studies have indicated that recidivism rates and reduction of crime are

correlated with higher education while incarcerated. However, according to The Institute

for Higher Education Policy (IHEP; 2020), an estimated 2.3 million people are detained

in the United States, making the United States the leader among all other countries with

the highest prison population. Statistics indicated that nearly 95 out of 100 of these incarcerated individuals will be released; however, 76.6% of ex-prisoners will be rearrested within 5 years. This percentage makes the United States the leader among all other countries in recidivism rates; therefore, programs and tools must be developed to effectively reduce these numbers (IHEP, 2020; Prison Studies Project, 2020).

Many prisons have turned toward education as a form of rehabilitation to reduce recidivism rates. The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) (BPI, 2020) works to redefine affordability, availability, and expectations associated with higher education. BPI strives to create radical inroads of access and opportunities for higher learning, transforming the negative impacts of criminal punishment to reduce recidivism. On average, the recidivism rate was 46% lower for incarcerated individuals who participated in prison education programs than those who did not partake in prison education (BPI, 2020; IHEP, 2020).

In addition to reducing recidivism rates, prison education programs are also correlated with reducing inmate violence (Pompoco et al., 2017). The incentives of prison education can be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivating. Increased job opportunities and increased literacy rates are among the top motivating factors for participating in prison education programs (Center for American Progress, 2018; Prison Studies Project, 2020). During incarceration, these educational opportunities are about reeducating offenders to increase their chances of success upon transition to society.

Pompoco et al. (2017) completed a study that included 16 offenders in Ohio who were released between 2008 and 2012. Each offender had started an educational program

during their incarceration. The study indicated that inmates who completed the GED program during incarceration had significantly lower recidivism rates than those who did not partake in the GED program. Not only were recidivism rates lower, but violent misconduct rates during incarceration were also lower than those who did not participate. Prison education programming is essential for inmate safety and transition back to society and the safety of all prison staff. It is crucial to grasp the pedagogy and composition that the prison systems utilize if successful educational programs are the goal (Pompoco et al., 2017).

Prison Education Options

Among the most potent remedies for the endemic crisis of criminal recidivism is education. Prison education can fit under various categories, including vocational or rehabilitation training, basic literacy programs, physical education, art programs, GED or high school equivalency, and even college degrees (Ohio University, 2015; Pompoco et al., 2017). Both state and federal institutions offer a variety of educational opportunities. Educational opportunities vary from state to state, as well as from one facility to the next. Each program is unique, serving a variety of inmates and having different characteristics. Each facility enforces strict parameters in which inmates can have multiple responsibilities. Not only do inmates have to comply with daily routine and boundaries that restrict their freedom, but many inmates also work within the prison and have to juggle that schedule (Tomar, 2019). Inmates often lack access to the internet, which makes it challenging to participate in educational courses online.

According to Runell (2018), approximately half of the prison systems offer a form of postsecondary education, and only 6–7% of inmates take advantage of this opportunity for higher learning. Postsecondary opportunities encompass both vocational certification and academic degrees. Postsecondary opportunities tend to be less pervasive. Vocational certificates focus on practical skills, are becoming more conventional than academic degrees, and are more likely to obtain public funding (Tomar, 2019).

There is a range of certifications and degrees, from associate's to a bachelor's degree, obtained during incarceration. Ohio University (2015) provides an example of online educational opportunities available to incarcerated individuals. Under the category of an associate's degree, inmates have five options. These include Applied Business Management, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Individualized Studies, and Science. A Bachelor of Specialized Studies program is also available. Students consult with an advisor to create their degree program and combine two programs to create a unique degree. In addition to these degrees, noncredit legal training is also available; however, this is only available in a text-based format. That training can include Paralegal Certificate, Advanced Paralegal, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Legal Investigation, Legal Secretary, and Victim Advocacy (Ohio University, 2015).

Institutions that are offering more educational attainment opportunities, despite obstacles, are seeing far more success in their inmates than those who are not affording inmates with increased educational opportunities. There are many benefits to obtaining job skills or a degree while incarcerated. Society must consider these benefits and how to

best support incarcerated individuals and those who may seek educational opportunities upon release as they pursue a better future.

Benefits of Prison Education

Incarceration rates, especially for women, continue to rise in the United States. With an incarceration rate of 693 per 100,000, the United States leads the world (Baranger et al., 2018; Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Incarceration rates have increased 834% among women, double that of men (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). If one were to imagine each state as an independent nation, then 23 states in the United States would qualify as having the highest incarceration rates in the world. Massachusetts is ranked lowest in incarceration rates but would still rank ninth globally (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Maintaining prison education has resulted in less prison violence, reduced recidivism, improved self-esteem, and increased opportunities upon release (Baranger et al., 2018).

Educational opportunities are an investment in society. For every dollar spent on prison education, 5 dollars are saved on reimprisonment (IHEP, 2020; RAND, 2018). Education changes lives. Additional research showed that a 1-million-dollar investment in incarceration can prevent roughly 350 crimes; however, if that same amount was invested in prison education, more than 600 crimes could be prevented. These numbers solidify the effectiveness of prison education (Northwestern University, 2020). Therefore, institutions and society could benefit from making educational opportunities more available and affordable. The battle continues between rehabilitation versus punishment.

According to IHEP (2020), from 1989 to 2013, higher education spending increased only 5% compared to an 89% increase in corrections.

The United States has defaulted to incarceration as a response to crime, with 70% of convictions leading to confinement (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). There are long-term benefits and contributions to investing in prison education. Uneducated individuals, especially those with a criminal record, are at a disadvantage. Upon release, ex-inmates are likely to earn at least 11% less doing the same job as someone with no criminal record. They are also 15–30% less likely to find a job than a person without a criminal record (Bender, 2018; Northwestern University, 2020). These barriers compound and make a successful reentry into the community less achievable.

Obtaining an education during incarceration is invaluable. Increased job skills, certificates, and degrees translate into employment opportunities, increased earnings, and reduction of recidivism (Tomar, 2019). Many sociological drivers of criminal behavior, such as racial inequality and economic disadvantage, are offset by educational attainment. Education improves the lives of the offenders and society by creating safer neighborhoods. With the United States leading the world in incarceration rates, reduced recidivism through increased educational opportunities can lower the burden on communities imposed by the prison system (Baranger et al., 2018; Tomar, 2019; Wagner & Sawyer, 2018).

Successful Programs

Despite obstacles surrounding prison education programs, some states demonstrate leadership in providing ample academic opportunities for their inmates.

Texas and California are amongst the top states who continue to prove that inmates who participate in prison education programs are least likely to become repeat offenders (Tomar, 2019). Research suggests that prison systems who provide more significant educational opportunities see positive results.

Many colleges and universities offer educational programs to institutions. Mail is the primary source of communication to proctor exams, facilitate learning, and award degrees. The following universities offer higher education to prisoners:

- Adams State University

- Andrews University

- Ashworth College

- Athabasca University

- Brigham Young University

- California Coast University

- California Miramar University

- Colorado State University (and CSU Pueblo)

- Huntington College of Health Sciences

- Louisiana State University

- Murray State University

- Ohio University

- Oklahoma State University

- Rio Salado College

- Sam Houston State University

- Seattle Central Community College

- Southwest University

- Texas State University

- Thomas Edison State

- Thompson Rivers University

- University of Central Arkansas

- University of Idaho

- University of Minnesota

- University of Mississippi

- University of North Carolina

- University of Northern Iowa

- University of Saskatchewan

- The University of Wisconsin (and Wisconsin-Platteville)

- University of Wyoming

- Upper Iowa University

- Wesleyan Center for Prison Education (Tomar, 2019).

In addition to programs offered via mail, some institutions provide vocational and certificate programs. Roughly three-quarters of inmates choose these types of programs. More than 86% of inmates who participate in prison education are housed in a facility in one of the 13 states considered to be of high enrollment:

- Arizona

- Arkansas

- California

- Idaho

- Indiana

- Louisiana

- Missouri

- New York

- Ohio

- South Carolina

- Texas

- Washington

- Wisconsin (Tomar, 2019).

Many states continue to face controversy surrounding funding for prison education. One argument is that more budget is spent on prison education than public education. The opposing argument is that it takes more funding for inmates because you are housing them around the clock. On average, a teacher can supervise 20.8 students, while a corrections officer oversees only 5.3 inmates (U.S. World News Report, 2020). Prisoners are also fed three times per day. So, there are valid correlations between the funding of prison education versus public education. Those states that have chosen to tackle this controversy have had much success with prison education.

Budget constraints continue to stand in the way of success for many institutions (Tomar, 2019). The most successful prison systems have been more creative in their

education. California is one state that emphasizes prison education and invests in the future of its inmates. More success has come from those states who offer online degrees, which provides a clear path for validating the relationship between educational institutions and prison systems.

Obstacles and Solutions to Success

Significant research to support educational programs reducing recidivism rates; however, inmate motivation and participation rates in these programs are low. RAND (2018) suggested several structural problems, both systematic and statewide, that hinder increased inmate participation. Therefore, states should take the necessary steps to ensure the benefits of correctional education programs are obtained.

RAND (2018) recommended restructuring the funding of educational programs. According to Bender (2018), instituting a funding formula similar to public education systems directly connected to inmate attendance could increase numbers in the prison classroom. If funding were dependent upon inmate participation, prison systems could work more diligently to staff them appropriately and provide the necessary supplies. The limitation of that strategy was that some student attendance absences are unavoidable.

President Trump signed the First Step Act (FSA) into law, which reauthorized the Second Chance Act (SCA) (The Council of State Governments, 2020). The Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018 provided $100 million a year to enhance and establish state and local programs that increased the chances of successful reentry into society upon release from prison. The SCA has impacted more than 164,000 people by

providing more than 900 grants to prison programs across 49 states (The Council of State Governments, 2020).

There were five key factors included within the SCA. First, it strengthened support for those who have been in the criminal justice system (The Council of State Governments, 2020). Many inmates have no support system waiting for them upon release; therefore, they are left to face this great challenge alone. Reentry programming provides wraparound services to assist inmates with reintegration into the community, such as housing substance abuse treatment, childcare, and expansion of career training.

Second, the SCA expands efforts to reduce substance addiction amongst inmates (The Council of State Governments, 2020). Reentry programs provided additional supports to decrease the chance of reoffending. Both state and local supports are increased, which targeted those with mental illness and substance abuse issues. Partnerships and grants have been established between agencies with priority consideration for non-profit organizations to develop programs to treat substance addiction.

The SCA has expanded eligibility for grant programs to provide critical reentry services (The Council of State Governments, 2020). This provision allowed nonprofit organizations to receive funding to administer specific programming, such as career training and substance addition services. A new program, Partnerships to Expand Access to Reentry Programs Proven to Reduce Recidivism, allowed faith and community-based nonprofits to work with local and federal prisons.

Finally, the SCA puts new accountability measures in place to ensure responsible spending of tax dollars (The Council of State Governments, 2020). SCA reauthorization gave priority to those applicants who work with an evaluator to ensure practical recidivism reduction goals. Additionally, they continue to require a regular review of grant recipients. The SCA is putting lessons learned into practice. The reauthorization act has moved to put SCA of 2008 into practice. SCA of 2008 identified best practices in correctional education programming, which had led to dedicated funding for implementing the best proven educational approaches for incarcerated individuals.

By establishing a funding formula based upon rates, an incentive would be provided to the prison system to enforce regular inmate participation. If inmates were not participating in their courses, then the prison would lose funding. Loss of funding prompts the prison to become more strategic in maintaining prison educators and other structural problems that may lower attendance rates. Additionally, a funding formula would more accurately align the budget for educational programs with the actual amount of money spent on classroom instruction, i.e., the funds spent educating inmates and nothing else (RAND, 2018; Prison Studies Project, 2020).

Conversely, Bender (2018) suggested that increasing incentives for inmate participation could be just as effective as restructuring funding. There were several measures available to provide inmates with incentives for their involvement in educational programming. Inmates care enormously about their prison life, which can be a motivating factor to encourage participation in education programs. Some of these prison life factors could be canteen, housing, visitation, and prison pay (Prison Studies

Project, 2020). By providing incentives that are important and motivating to these

inmates, you could potentially increase their participation. Since research showed a

correlation between education levels and reduced recidivism, prisons could link inmate

pay to their level of educational attainment. Incentives could increase inmate

participation and their advancement in studies to ultimately decrease their chance of

recidivism (Prison Studies Project, 2020).

Another incentive suggested by Braswell (2017) is early release for successful

participation in education programs. Some prison systems offer day-for-day release

credits or work release credits for service to their state; however, education release credits

for certain levels of educational attainment while incarcerated could be a significant

motivating factor. On the contrary, prisons could have the option of revoking these

credits for disciplinary infractions. The benefit to the state could be saving money when

shorter prison terms are served. The advantage to the inmate could be increased education

or job skills to become more successful upon release.

The length of educational programs, as well as making them mandatory, posed

additional concerns. Inmate participation could increase if half-day programs were an

option. Mandatory attendance could remove the inmates' desire to be self-directed, which

could decrease motivation. Prison systems could also benefit from half-day programs by

reducing costs. Half-day programs could increase program capacity indirectly, without

additional expenses. According to Reininger-Rogers (n.d.), some inmates decline to

attend educational programs because they prefer to work a job to receive payment. With

half-day programs, inmates could be allowed to work for income and attend education programs.

As the Prison Studies Project (2020) mentioned above, motivation and participation rates could increase significantly if inmates were paid for educational attainment and working a job. The payment incentive benefits the inmates, as they are not losing income, and they are also obtaining an education or job skills. This balance of working, getting an education, and making money could be enticing to the inmates. Inmates who are struggling learners or have had difficulty in school might also be more willing to participate and be successful in half-day programs.

Once inmates near release, they are often moved to camps outside of the prisons (Runell, 2018). These camps are seen as a transition, or step-down, from incarceration back to society. There is less security and more freedom. While step-down is a positive step for inmates, there are fewer options for educational programs at the camps. Research has also shown that inmates often lose their opportunity to complete programs or certifications if transferred while in progress. The cohesiveness between incarceration and camps is lacking.

In a Netflix documentary titled *College Behind Bars*, Burns and Botstein (2019) illustrated what education looks like behind bars, the obstacles faced by inmates and staff, as well as first-hand experiences. According to Burns and Botstein, 630,000 Americans are released every year from prison, and nearly half of that number is back in prison within 3years. One of the biggest roadblocks mentioned was the lack of access to

educational programs. Out of 53,000 inmates incarcerated in New York, only 950 have access to higher education, and 300 are attempting degrees through BPI (BPI, 2020).

Acceptance into BPI and higher education was competitive, triggering yet another obstacle. Many inmates applied to BPI; however, the essay and interview required are problematic for many individuals. Inmates found it hard to comprehend the interview questions and the words that are being utilized. According to BPI (2020), applicants must show an enormous interest in changing their lives, and many applicants are criminals serving lengthy sentences.

Even when accepted into BPI or higher education courses, inmates encountered additional hurdles. Inmates were not learning in traditional school buildings (i.e., traditional classrooms with conventional materials). There was a more basic teaching structure (i.e., chalkboards instead of electronics and minimal supplies). There was a misconception about the amount of free time that prisoners have. Time constraints were also an issue. According to BPI (2020), inmates had constant interruptions, such as five head counts per day that created chaos and made it difficult for students to focus in the classroom. These interruptions left many student inmates having to stay up late to study to have quiet time to concentrate.

Educational limitations are compounded by the high costs of college courses, lack of funding, lack of internet, and lack of access to grants within the system (Runell, 2018; Tomar, 2019). The decline of public funding for prison education adds a hurdle for inmates to clear to receive any aid Despite limitations to higher education, most institutions are mandated to participate in high school education or GED education.

Learning Styles

When thinking of education, specifically prison education, educators must consider learning styles. According to Crosby-Martinez (2016), a combination of direct and indirect instruction was most effective. This strategy focused on a transformation of the inmates themselves or their world. By having a deeper understanding of themselves, Crosby-Martinez (2016) suggested that the inmates will become more inspired to do better and make the world a better place. This type of inspiration in a prison setting could be the difference in a successful life upon release versus recidivism.

Crosby-Martinez (2016) defined four learning styles. The first style is Didactic-Direct teaching, which incorporated primarily verbal instruction and was in lecture form. The second style was Modeling-Direct teaching, which utilized many visual techniques in the form of demonstration or practice. The third style was Managerial-Indirect teaching. This style involved facilitation, group, and individualization management. Last, Dialogic-Indirect teaching was comprised of questions and thought provocations.

For many incarcerated students, this is their first attempt at really caring about their education enough to combat all the obstacles around them to become educated. This new outlook on education is challenging when learning has likely been a struggle in the past. According to BPI (2020), countless inmates do not even understand how to form a paragraph or read at an age-appropriate level properly. They are simply unprepared for higher education and often spend time tutoring each other to ensure their success. Inmates participating in the BPI will usually memorize paragraphs of Moby Dick and help each other practice reciting them (BPI, 2020). As other groups form in prison, so do those

groups that include students with like educational goals. Reality is setting in that you cannot take education away. Knowing the importance of education is an important concept when many inmates are simply surviving, not living.

The idea of addressing various learning styles is to frequently change the model in the way that instruction is delivered. In the prison educational setting, many inmates were either struggling learners in school, did not finish school, or were simply not interested in their education. Therefore, ensuring that a variety of learning styles are covered can increase the opportunity to promote learning. Crosby-Martinez (2016) suggests that education is a recidivism reduction tool. When an offender obtains an education or job skills, it benefits the community, as there are lower costs associated with incarcerating offenders, reduced strain on the families of the incarcerated, and an economic boost for society (Crosby-Martinez, 2016; Hall, 2015).

Academic Self-Efficacy

Prison education may be how an inmate chooses to adapt to prison life. Inmates are still human beings, and human beings tend to choose activities they are interested in or feel successful in doing. Conversely, people tend to refrain from exercises they are not good at; therefore, academic self-efficacy could be further explained. According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2020), self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy, a component of social learning theory, is critical to task completion as it encompasses the perception that learners have about their competencies. It can influence the amount of energy expended towards a goal and behavioral

performance. Incarcerated individuals can have lower levels of self-efficacy due to the nature of the prison environment (Cage, 2019).

Self-efficacy differs from self-concept. It is not so much the inmate's beliefs of what skills or abilities they might possess, but the ideas about what they might accomplish in a given situation. Academic self-efficacy refers to one's personal belief about what they can achieve on an academic task, whether it be reading, writing, or math, as well as how they may organize or study (Roth et al., 2017; Roth et al., 2016).

According to Roth et al. (2017), few studies have been done regarding prisoners' self-efficacy. What is known is that self-efficacy among incarcerated inmates is increased in comparison to college students in prison. Self-regulated learning and self-efficacy have a significant relationship. A study conducted by Jones et al. (2013) concluded that those with higher writing self-efficacy skills were more likely to participate in prison education programs than those with reading or spelling skills.

Self-efficacy has been related to a reduction in drop-out rates (Jones et al., 2013). By building a sense of cognitive efficacy, inmates have higher academic aspirations. When students, including inmates who participate in educational programs, have a higher level of effectiveness and feel competent, they are more likely to participate. Those who have a lower level of efficacy and do not feel competent in task completion are more likely to negatively respond to learning.

Academic self-efficacy and academic motivation have a documented relationship. Studies have shown that both independently influence a person's educational choices (Bandura, 1997; Jones et al., 2013). A study completed by Behan (2014) concluded that

incarcerated students' reasons for obtaining their education were somewhat reflective of the same motives of non-incarcerated individuals. It was revealed that both sets of students could be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Whether students seek education for personal interest or better their chances of a job, incarcerated individuals are motivated by additional factors, such as alleviating boredom, socialization, or a less constraining routine (Behan, 2014).

Motivating Factors

Once incarcerated, an inmate may have a variety of reasons for pursuing their GED or higher education. It is a commitment to produce change and increase positive outcomes after prison. For others, being behind bars has been a life-changing experience and enough to motivate them for better life choices. Obtaining an education is a way to prove to themselves and others that a productive path is their goal (Runell, 2018; Tomar, 2019).

Motivation is the desire to act in service of a goal (Psychology Today, 2020). It is critical for both learning and achievement outcomes. Once faced with an adverse situation, such as learning within an institutional setting, motivation can waiver. Motivation differs from an inmate's grit or tenacity, as those characteristics have a different set of antecedents and implications for learning. Decades of research have indicated key findings related to motivation to learn, such as when the value is foreseeable. Tasks are manageable, and learners tend to persist. Intrinsic motivation is often more potent than reward or punishment, focus on learning rather than performance increases goal setting, and developing a learning orientation, rather than focusing on

performance, is often effective when teachers are encouraging. Further studies have shown several additional motivational factors for learning.

Both motivational factors and challenges are essential to understand when viewing higher education in prison. Runell (2018) conducted a study that consisted of interviewing 34 previously incarcerated individuals. All 34 individuals participated in prison education programming. Although educational programming benefits both the inmate and society, not much focus was put upon drawing inmates into these programs. The research concluded that when considering variables, such as visits from family, pre-incarceration income, educational history, gender, and race, gender was a significant indicator of participation (Baranger et al., 2018).

The most significant motivating factor for participating in educational programs was whether the inmate maintained regular visits with friends and family. Additionally, the opportunity to participate in such programs, especially life skills and community reintegration, was another key factor. Further analysis of these findings suggested Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory was essential to institutional education. Inmates are likely more motivated to participate when opportunities are present to enhance their lives.

Correctional experts have found that motivation plays a valuable role in inmate participation and levels of achievement. Additional research by the Prison Studies Project (2020) suggests that incentives are essential, as they improve the security of the prisons, education program outcomes, and ultimately improve society. With a well-designed

incentives program, it is likely that inmate participation would escalate, which assists in their transition back to society, reducing recidivism (Bender, 2018).

While Crosby-Martinez (2016) and Hall (2015) emphasized learning styles in prison education, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Learning (2018) focused on specific motivating factors as the key to increased participation in prison education. This previous research considered different theoretical perspectives. The behavior-based learning theory suggested that motivation depended on incentives, habits, reinforcement schedules, and drive. Cognitive approaches focused more on goal setting and how individuals monitored their progress towards obtaining their goals. Also, cognitive theorists considered social interactions and the learning environment. Motivation has also been viewed as an emergent phenomenon, developing and changing over time due to learning experiences. Curiosity and interest can trigger a person's motivation and learning (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Learning, 2018).

Education can be effective and promote change when the needs of the students are met; however, the individual must want to change. Intrinsic motivation can be difficult for inmates simply due to their circumstances (Cage, 2019; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Learning, 2018). An internal reward drives inherent motivation. The basis extends from the activity or task being naturally satisfying to the individual. Prison educators can foster intrinsic motivation when instruction is individual and caters to the interests of the inmates. Prison educators should make more individual and instructive classroom goals to cater to the learning of the inmates to elicit intrinsic

motivation. In contrast, external motivators are driven by external rewards. Rewards can be an essential tool for engaging inmates; however, external rewards can harm intrinsic motivation regarding persistence and achievement.

To look further into motivational factors, Roth and Manger (2014) suggest consideration of future planning, social reasons and escapism, and competence building. Future planning was described as making life easier upon release regarding getting a job and avoiding recidivism. Social reasons and escapism are defined as a way to meet other inmates and escape the regular daily routine of prison. Competence building is described as learning just for the sake of learning.

A study conducted by Manger et al. (2016) yielded those inmates who participated in educational programs had high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels. Inmates reported that they wanted to improve their chances of job obtainment and a more productive life post-conviction. Along with future planning, competence building greatly influenced an inmate's participation in prison education programs. These findings aligned with the research results on non-incarcerated individuals, which indicated that both seek desirable and pleasurable accomplishments both inward and outward.

Roth and Manger's (2014) study correlated with these findings that learning to learn, or competence building, increased inmate participation in educational programs. This type of motive is relational to the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Those students who have a high level of intrinsic motivation were more likely to become engaged and seek competence building. Those who seek future planning

and social reasons, or escapism, were fulfilling extrinsic needs (Cage, 2019; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Learning, 2018).

Social and cultural differences were another factor in classroom participation and motivation. People tend to interpret the world, expectations, solve problems, and develop social-emotional dispositions based on influences and life experiences. In prison, there are many different social and cultural groups (Cage, 2019). Based on these characteristics, individuals tend to engage with those who are most like themselves. Social connections can be based upon these identities, which support their sense of belonging. The benefit could be learning to think about problems and goals from different cultural perspectives (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Learning, 2018; Cage, 2019).

According to Panitsides and Moussiou (2019), escaping the everyday prison environment and possible sentence reduction were motivating factors for participation in educational programs. These findings were consistent with Parson and Langenback's (1993) findings that inmates study to have something to do to pass the time, otherwise referred to as activity orientation. Avoidance posture, or the preference of studying to avoid a less pleasant activity, is also deemed a motivating factor (Jones et al., 2013). Many inmates have a genuine interest in learning simply for the sake of learning and self-improvement, which has been identified in other respective studies (Roth & Manger, 2014).

Furthermore, previous studies indicated that longer sentence length increased inmate motivation to participate in educational programs. This was a credible

explanation, as prisoners with shorter sentences may not see the value or worth in pursuing an education. In addition to this finding, Roth et al. (2017) study indicated that mid-sentence inmates were also more motivated to participate in educational programs. Several explanations were offered for these findings. The first explanation surrounded an inmate's adjustment to the prison setting and environment. Society to prison is a dramatic change for many individuals, and many have survival as a priority. Once inmates are settled in or served some of their time, they begin to prepare for post-release (Roth et al., 2017).

A previous study by Panitsides and Moussiou (2019) reported that less than half of their inmate participants indicated that getting a better job once released was not a motivating factor in educational participation. This same study found that less than one-fifth of these same participants identified social aspects of prison education as motivating. These findings negate Behan's (2014) analysis that incarcerated students participate in education for social reasons, prompting questions and demand for further research regarding motivational factors.

Role of the Prison Educator

Prison facilities have an essential goal of rehabilitating offenders for them to integrate successfully into society once released. Therefore, it is necessary for those professionals working with inmates to have positive attitudes towards them. Having a positive attitude towards inmates can give them hope that someone still believes in them. The inmate can feel as though they are human and not being treated as a deviant individual (Kjelsberg, Skoglund, & Rustad, 2007).

Prison employee's attitudes are vital in facilitating change during incarceration. Educators, especially, have a significant influence over inmate attitudes. Educators tend to believe in the good and can provide hope to inmates during a dark time in their lives. They're unlike correctional officers, whose role and interaction with inmates can be more aggressive, as they have the power to enforce the rules. This leaves corrections officers described as having negative attitudes, cynical, and the belief that the facility's objective is to maintain prisoners instead of promoting rehabilitation and prevention (Kjelsberg et al., 2007; Vella, 2005).

A study conducted by Kjelsberg et al. (2007) found that employees who worked in female-only facilities exhibited more positive attitudes than male-only facilities. Successful reintegration and the effectiveness of educational programs rely on the positive attitudes of educators towards prisoners. Educators who are caring and show genuine interest in the inmate's wellbeing can positively impact the inmate.

There are many roles that a prison educator may have to play. Inmates are in prison for many reasons and lack some level of regard for society and its rules. Prison educators may be the first encounter of a positive role model for some inmates. Due to this absence of prior role models, inmates lack the skills necessary to develop healthy interpersonal relationships (Kjelsberg et al., 2007; Schlesinger, 2005). Prison educators can play the role of mentoring to facilitate transformation by teaching them to self-assess and show concern for their learning process. Therefore, developing social skills and a level of trust might be a priority on the educator's list. Without these basic needs being

met, the inmate may be less inclined to learn from and follow the instructions of an educator.

Prison educators may play more roles than public educators, increasing the need for further research on the daily operations of prison education systems and the daily activities that educators lead in a prison classroom. Counseling is another role assumed by prison educators. Often, inmates are challenged with functioning in the prison setting and may seek advice from educators, especially if rapport has been established. Prison educators can take on a life coach role, encouraging inmates to think about the positives of education and setting attainable goals (Kjelsberg, 2007).

Although public educators are inclined to face adversity with students, this adversity is increased when incorporating the inmates' environment. Consequently, it is beneficial that prison educators obtain training outside of general qualifications to teach. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2020), inmate instructors could benefit from anger management, behavior management, special education training, and a combination of education and experience. Due to amplified interactions with various races, cultures, and ethnicities, prison educators could also profit from diversity and sensitivity training (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2020).

The Virginia Department of Correctional Education (DCE) conducted a study to evaluate the needs of prison educators. Their study concluded that traditional educator licensure programs do not fully prepare educators to work within the prison classroom setting (Jurich et al., 2001). Previous research found that the basic principles of psychology, strategies to deal with antagonistic prison systems, anger management, and

diffusion of crises were lacking. A similar ethnographic study conducted by Schlesinger (2005) focused on African American male inmates. The study revealed that inmates respond best to educators who stimulate their motivation to learn. Inmates were more motivated if the prison educator exhibited a genuine desire to learn about the inmate's culture; however, most inmates participated for non-educational purposes.

Prison systems that are proactive in ensuring adequate preparation of prison educators can expect more positive outcomes. Educators who have been thoroughly trained are far more likely to understand the culture they are teaching, allowing them to manage a diverse population more effectively. Additional training also provides prison educators insight into their own biases and perceptions regarding criminals. Educators who are aware of these biases can better prepare to take on a role in which they can be an essential part of facilitating learning despite the inmate's past.

Summary

Previous research has suggested that prison education programs can support the reduction of recidivism rates and offer a stable, long-term solution towards producing more educated and productive members of society. Statistics indicate that nearly 95 out of 100 of these incarcerated individuals will be released; however, 76.6% of ex-prisoners will be rearrested within 5 years (IHEP, 2020; Prison Studies Project, 2020). Many prisons have turned towards education as a form of rehabilitation to reduce recidivism rates. In addition to reducing recidivism rates, prison education programs correlate with reducing inmate violence (Pompoco et al., 2017).

Educational opportunities are an investment in society (Pompoco et al., 2017; Ohio University, 2015). Prison education can fit under various categories, including vocational or rehabilitation training, basic literacy programs, physical education, art programs, GED or high school equivalency, and even college degrees. Increased job skills, certificates, and degrees translate into employment opportunities, increased earnings, and reduction of recidivism (Tomar, 2019). Educational limitations are compounded by the high costs of college courses, lack of funding, lack of internet, and lack of access to grants within the system, and the decline of public funding for prison education (Runell, 2018; Tomar, 2019). Institutions that offer more educational attainment opportunities, despite obstacles, have seen far more success in their inmates than those who are not affording inmates with increased educational opportunities.

The scholarly community does not know the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. To better understand the influence of correctional education programs on recidivism, it was vital to comprehend the reasons for inmate participation from the educator's perspective. This research extended knowledge in this discipline by addressing the gap in the literature that surrounded specific information regarding prison education programs. This information included motives for participation, which could impact recidivism rates. Increased participation in prison education programs could lead to better societal outcomes, such as a lower financial impact on the economy, lower recidivism rates, less overcrowding in the prison system, and restoration of families. This research was necessary to enhance our understanding of the positive impacts of prison education.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Education provides inmates with increased opportunities postrelease and can reduce recidivism. This research was necessary to enhance understanding of the positive impacts of prison education. The research questions addressed the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. This chapter includes the methodology used to explore prison educators' perceptions and observations to answer the research questions.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ1: What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs?

RQ2: What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs?

Case study, grounded theory, and phenomenological research designs were considered for this study. Case studies include multiple data collection procedures to provide a more in-depth analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Willis, 2019). Grounded theory has many steps in the analysis, often aimed at the development of a theory that offers an explanation of the main concern being studied and how that concern is resolved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Theory development was not part of the current study. Therefore, a phenomenological design was used to examine the participants' experiences.

I selected a qualitative phenomenological design to conduct individual interviews with prison educators to examine their responses to open-ended questions concerning their lived experiences as prison educators. Personal interviews are a valuable technique used to explore a person's perception of a given phenomenon, contributing to in-depth data collection (Frances et al., 2009). Focusing on creating additional opportunities geared toward success was consistent with Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory because lack of education and job skills are critical factors in recidivism (RAND, 2019). Qualitative methodology was consistent with exploring how inmate participation and motivation in educational programs may reduce their chances to reoffend, which may provide knowledge to all stakeholders.

Participant Selection

Data for this study included interviews with prison educators who had taught, past or present, in prison education programs for at least 2 years. The target group of interest was 12 to 15 prison educators. I reached out to friends and family employed in the prison system to reduce risks associated with known participation in a research study regarding prison education programs. To safeguard each participant's privacy, I asked friends and family to deliver information regarding the study and consent, along with my contact information. If could not obtain enough interviews through friends and family, snowball sampling would be utilized. If the individuals wished to participate, they were asked to contact me. A $15 gift card was offered to each participant.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected via in-depth interviews. In preparing to develop

my interview questions, I reviewed my research questions to remind myself of what I

wanted to know. I wanted to explore participation and motivation in educational

programs through interviews with prison educators to gain their perspectives and

observations. I theorized that prison educators' perceptions regarding inmate participation

had to do with lack of funding, lack of educators, lack of trusting relationships between

staff and inmates, and lack of access to curriculum and materials, which tied into

Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory.

Questions were modified so they were open-ended, neutral, one question at a

time, and consistent with participants' level of education and culture. Follow-up

questions were included to probe and gain further insight into participants' answers. An

introduction was provided, including obtaining informed consent, and the interview

began with a simple warm-up question. More difficult questions were asked in the middle

of the interview. The discussion was closed with a broad question, thanking the

participant and informing them again regarding how the information would be verified

and provided to them. Vandewater (2014) interviewed a prison educator, which guided

some of my thoughts and prompted some of the questions to be included in the interview.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with prison educators and took between 60

and 90 minutes. The data collected through interviews with prison educators were

analyzed using the phenomenological approach, which consisted of data collection,

analysis, and reporting the commonalities of the lived experiences of prison educators. Handwritten field notes accompanied the audio recording. Once interviews were completed, the tapes were transcribed verbatim before data analysis (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). It was essential to recognize that interview participants were also analytic. Therefore, the information obtained through these interviews was part of a collective meaning that may have required interpretation of layers to identify underlying themes. An interactive strategy occurred throughout the research process (see Chan, 2011).

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Educational opportunities provide inmates with increased opportunities postrelease and reduce recidivism. Research questions addressed the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding the lack of inmate participation in prison education programs.

Data analysis was consistent with the phenomenological approach and involved axial coding, categorizing, and making sense of the meanings of the phenomenon (see Patton, 2015). As I delved deeper into the interview transcripts, I hoped that common themes would emerge. This process was repeated as long as necessary to ensure a thorough description of the phenomenon.

According to Kleiman (2004), the researcher should begin by reading the transcript in its entirety and then read it a second time more slowly to divide the data into meaningful sections. After reading through a second time, the researcher should attempt to make sense of those sections that have similar content. At this time, the researcher can

elaborate on their findings and then revisit the raw data description to justify the interpretation of the meanings. Finally, the researcher should follow up with a critical analysis of the data to verify the findings. Critical analysis ensures that detailed descriptions have been obtained from the participants, the phenomenological reduction has been maintained throughout the investigation, essential meanings have been discovered, a structure has been articulated, and the raw data have verified the results.

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) software consists of programs that store and analyze data. QDA software can save the researcher an immense amount of time, manage a large data set, and increase flexibility (Predictive Analysis Today, 2016). Quirko's is a QDA software with a visual component; it is affordable and offers many tools to support the data analysis process. This QDA was used during the data analysis process.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to collect, analyze, and report the findings to increase understanding of the phenomenon of interest. The researcher's role is to attempt to access the experiences of the study participants. Qualitative research requires the researcher to be self-aware and understand any personal bias. A journal should be kept so the researcher can reflect on their reactions to the interviews conducted to assist in reducing bias. Ultimately, it is the role of the researcher to safeguard their participants and their data (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Positivists often question the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Perhaps that is because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way

in real work. Quantitative analysis refers to trustworthiness as validity and reliability; however, these concepts are more obscure in qualitative studies because researchers cannot use instruments with these same established metrics. According to Statistics Solutions (2018), trustworthiness is about establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The first, credibility, refers to internal validity. The researcher seeks to ensure that the study measures what it is intended to measure. Transferability refers to external validity and concerns itself with the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other situations. In reference to reliability, dependability is employed to ensure that similar results would be obtained if the study were repeated. In reference to objectivity, confirmability suggests the findings are based on the participant's responses and not the researcher's bias or personal motivations (Shenton, 2004).

Techniques and strategies are available that the researcher can employ. The researcher can use triangulation to show the study's findings are credible and can use thick description to show that the study's findings can apply to other contexts, circumstances, and situations to ensure transferability. The researcher can use an inquiry audit or audit trail to establish dependability, highlighting every data analysis step. An audit trail also provides a rationale for the decisions made, ensuring confirmability (Statistic Solutions, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (08-24-20-0745039) is responsible for ensuring that research adheres to not only ethical standards but the U.S.

federal regulations as well (Walden University, 2010). Researchers must obtain approval through the IRB before any data collection. Research completed before approval could result in consequences that may delay the dissertation process (Walden University, 2010).

The strict and precise ethical guidelines set forth by Walden University's IRB may impact the selection of the research population, research setting, and research design in multiple ways. One way that the IRB ethical guidelines could affect the appointment of a research population is if a researcher attempts to use children, pregnant women, or incarcerated persons (Walden University, 2010). According to Sims (2010), three principles protect human subjects. Those three principles are justice, benevolence, and respect for persons. The benefits must outweigh the risks of research to be considered ethical (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the current study, I did not recruit a vulnerable population, and I ensured the protection and confidentiality of participants through discretion when presenting the findings. Additionally, a mismatch between data collection and research questions and researchers who hold dual roles can also infringe on ethical guidelines (Walden University, 2010). To confront these issues, I asked for suggestions from the IRB regarding analyzing data without harming these relationships.

This study was projected to have a low-risk level for participants because the interviews were completed in private, away from the prison setting, with no identifying demographics. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the option to initiate contact with me if they wanted to be included. To further reduce any risks, the interviews were conducted outside of work hours. The purpose of the study was discussed, and I was available to address any questions or concerns. Participants were given the right to

withdraw, without penalty, at any time. All data collected were stored in a password-protected file on my computer. All nonelectronic data will be held in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and will be destroyed after 5 years as part of Walden University's protocol.

Summary

The research design and rationale were described in this chapter, along with my intended methodology. A plan was included for data analysis. Ethical issues were considered and expanded upon to ensure each participant's safety, well-being, and confidentiality. Chapter 4 addresses the data collection and analysis results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Exploring perceptions allowed me to gain further insight into how prison educators personally interpret inmate participation and motivation. This research was necessary to enhance the understanding of the positive impacts of prison education. The study approach was qualitative with a phenomenological design including interviews with prison educators. This chapter outlines the findings of this phenomenological study. I applied Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory to analyze the data, and Quirko's provided the tool for systematic coding and organizing codes into themes. Two research questions were examined:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs?

RQ2: What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs?

Setting

Interviews were completed during the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, they were conducted via phone instead of face-to-face. Phone interviews were convenient and safe and were held at times chosen by the participants to allow them to be in a comfortable, neutral environment.

Demographics

Interviews were completed in private, away from the prison setting, with no identifying demographics to maintain a low-risk level to participants.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study included eight interviews with prison educators who had taught, past or present, in prison education programs for at least 2 years. The target group of interest was 12 to 15 prison educators; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of interviews was reduced to eight. Roughly one to two interviews were completed each month from September of 2020 to March of 2021. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. All participants were provided informed consent before the formal interviews. An interview protocol was followed, and a semistructured interview approach was used.

Additionally, a recording application, Call Recorder, was used to document the interviews with the participants. The interview questions were asked within the allotted time for follow-up inquiries. I was open to answering or addressing any concerns the participants had after completing the data-gathering session. Call Recorder was used to transcribe each interview, and I allowed participants to access the recorded and transcribed interviews for clarification. After participant approval of the transcript, data analysis commenced.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was consistent with the phenomenological approach and involved axial coding, categorizing, and making sense of the meanings of the phenomenon (see

Patton, 2015). QDA software was used during data analysis. Response to open-ended questions from the interview protocol were recorded on an iPhone using a Call Recorder application.

Initially, I reviewed the transcribed documents and read them a second time more slowly to divide the data into meaningful sections. The perceptions and observations of the participants were noted. Each participant's responses were analyzed and clustered into words and meanings to understand participants' perceptions regarding inmate participation in prison education programs and their observations concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs.

I identified which codes were the most important to answer the research questions by entering the queries and keywords, such as "goals," "motivation," and "participation," into the search bar. Once those principal codes were established, they were elevated to the status of category. Then, the documents were reviewed a third time while listening to the interview simultaneously. Studying a third time allowed for the correction of errors in the transcript and for notes to be taken to ensure the interpretation of the data was accurate. A final review of the documents allowed me to pick up on additional codes or themes to provide a thorough description of the phenomenon. Critical analysis of the data was completed to verify the findings. Critical analysis ensured that detailed descriptions were obtained from the participants, the phenomenological reduction had been maintained throughout the study, essential meanings had been discovered, a structure had been articulated, and the raw data had verified the results. There were no discrepant cases, and the perceptions and observations were accurate to the individual participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Four different measures were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. According to Statistics Solutions (2018), trustworthiness is about establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The first, credibility, refers to internal validity. I sought to ensure that the study measured what it was intended to measure. Credibility was attained by collecting and analyzing the perceptions and observations of the eight participants. Each participant was asked to share this information to their level of comfort. Furthermore, all participants were provided with interview transcripts to review for accuracy. Review of transcripts allowed participants to examine and modify their shared responses.

Transferability refers to external validity and concerns itself with the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other situations. Theory development was not part of the current study. Therefore, a phenomenological design was used to examine the participants' experiences. Focus upon creating additional opportunities geared toward success was consistent with Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory, as lack of education and job skills are critical factors in recidivism (RAND, 2019). In reference to reliability, dependability is employed to ensure that similar results would be obtained if the study were repeated. Dependability was guaranteed by providing that all eight participants were comfortable and focused during the interviews and affirming that the participants were not experiencing any problems or dealing with any issues that influenced their lived experiences.

Finally, in reference to objectivity, confirmability suggests the findings are based on the participant's responses and not on the researcher's bias or personal motivations. Confirmability was addressed by performing an audit trail. After each interview, I wrote notes in a journal to document unique and exciting topics to reduce bias when merging codes and explaining themes. An audit trail also provided a rationale for the decisions made, ensuring confirmability (see Statistic Solutions, 2018).

Results

A phenomenological study was conducted to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Past and present prison educators were asked open-ended questions to elicit their personal experiences. Eight educators were interviewed via telephone and shared some similar responses to the interview questions. The research questions that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs?

RQ 2: What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs?

For most participants, being involved in prison education programs allowed them to provide inmates with additional skills and resources to reintegrate into their communities. Participants have an unusual opportunity to teach soft and hard skills, which directly impact the inmate's confidence and success when returning to society. Educational programs can bridge the gap between incarceration and being a productive

member of the community once again. Each of these participants was motivated by being

able to make a difference in someone's life. Table 1 shows the themes related to RQ1.

Table 1

Emerging Themes for RQ1

Research question	Theme
RQ1: What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs?	Time commitment
	Access to programs
	Negative interaction

Theme 1: Time Commitment

It is a preconceived notion that inmates have nothing but time; however, these

interviews suggested that it is often up to the individual inmate to determine how that

time is spent. One recurring idea was time commitment. Jobs throughout the prisons are

more hands-on, and inmates are sometimes paid for these positions, ultimately interfering

with educational programs. P1 stated "if they have the chance to get paid for a job, where

they can move around the prison and aren't really bothered, then they're going to choose

that over coming to sit in a class." P3 suggested "sometimes they prefer to work and

make money unless they're ordered by a judge to attend." P7 put it in different terms by

stating "they have to make the choice every day to come to my class rather than to go to

other things. It is that simple."

In the prison setting, inmates often associate with specific groups of people,

whether gang, religious affiliations, or finding a significant other. Although there were

various opinions on why these connections may take place, they appeared to be a factor in participation in prison programs. P3 said

> It is a time commitment they want to be laying in their bed. Um, out on the yard. They want to be hanging out with relationships. Even though they are not allowed to have girlfriends in here, they still do that. So, they will quit groups over that which is crazy to me, but it is a social aspect.

P8 commented on the same idea of relationships, saying "they sabotage time off for two reasons. Reason number one is the girlfriend. They don't want to leave before them, which is crazy." This comment referenced the time that the inmates may get off their sentence if they participate in programs. Additionally, P6 added "one (reason) is just pure laziness. Just they just want to lay in bed. And some of that, I think, is maybe they're just depressed or whatever."

Educational programs are viewed as a lot of time with little gratification for many inmates. There is not much immediate gratification either. P7 spoke about their experience in the public school system versus the prison system and mentioned prisons being more for punishment and less for rehabilitation: "Why do they want to put in the time if they cannot see the benefit? I see so much of that right now, the immediate gratification. If they do not get it, then they get discouraged." According to many of the participants, it has been a struggle to get the inmates to see the value in education and view it as rehabilitation instead of just wasted time.

Theme 2: Access to Programs

Although every participant named various programs at their institutions, a second

theme revealed was access to these programs in multiple forms. Some of the programs

listed were Culinary Arts, HVAC, Adult Basic Education, GED, Five-Week Program (for

those about to be released), college courses, computer courses, Anger Management,

recovery for drugs and alcohol, Mental Health, Trauma Recovery, high school

completion, Thinking for a Change, and Outpatient Program. Each participant was

confident that inmates were regularly updated about available programs by their

handbook or case manager.

In 2020–2021, the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, and prison

systems were no exception. All eight participants mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as

a reason for the recent lack of participation. One way that the pandemic affected

participation is by prisons being on lockdown. Each time there would be an inmate or

staff member who contracted COVID-19, certain pods would be locked down or the

entire prison would be locked down. During this time, inmates had extreme social

barriers and were not allowed to be in close quarters to participate in any programs.

"They may do work in their cells or something like that, but not in the classrooms," said

P4.

Another issue with the access to programs was the lack of staff. Five of the eight

participants mentioned programs that were no longer operating due to a lack of qualified

staff. P6 stated "it's just trying to find somebody with the credentials to come in and

teach, you know, who wants to come in and work in the prison, right? Everybody doesn't

want to do that." P3 and P5 mentioned a lack of staff due to COVID-19. Both P3 and P1 spoke about how they had vacancies and funding to fill positions before the pandemic; however, they were no longer looking to fill those positions because the government enforced a hiring freeze. P1, P3, P4, and P5 voiced concern on programs listed as available but were not unavailable. P5 said

> Okay. And I do not mean to be bitter or negative, but just for your information, this state has a lot to offer on paper. If you look at the programs, if you look at what is available on paper, it all looks great. It looks like there is a whole lot, but the reality is you must really investigate. What is the reality of this program? How many people actually get it? What is the quality of the program?

Another obstacle to access is one's prison sentence. Because many institutions are short staffed and lack funding, programs are mostly available to those closer to their release dates. P5 spoke about how many inmates will come and go and never get any treatment because it may not be offered until their last year before release. P4 expressed concerns about having only four staff members to 900 inmates for one program, while P8 talked about cutting class sizes from 15 to seven. P2 mentioned that in their institution, they go off of the inmate's outdate. The outdate is when they will be released. Therefore, if an inmate has a long sentence, it will be a very long time before they get any help. P3 went on to say

> That is kind of sad, but we have to do it that way because if we miss somebody to put a long termer in there then they could go home without any treatment at all and not get any of the benefits. So that's a huge hindrance we have is just we can

only take so many people and it leaves people waiting. I will get kites (notes or

letters of requests) from inmates saying like I've been on the waiting list for five

years and I'm still not in … and well, you still have a lot on your sentence like it's

just that's the hardest hindrance for a lot of them.

On the other hand, seven of eight participants spoke about Pre-GED, GED, and

Adult Basic Education programs. It was noted that regardless of an inmate's sentence,

these programs take everyone. Conversely, higher education or college programs are

based on the outdate as well.

Security levels pose another problem for inmates to gain access. P6 went into

detail about the security levels of different institutions, stating that maximum-security

prisons are very limited with what they can offer: "You would think max security these

guys need it the most, but we are just very, very limited because of that." P1 and P7

spoke about the number of hours an inmate can be locked up in one day. Inmates in

confinement may be on television screens to communicate with anyone, so educational

programs are not a concern for this population. The participants seemed a bit irritated

when speaking about the issues surrounding access because it impacts their day. An

inmate can be called from the classroom, and classes can often be canceled at any point

in time. Educators have no control over these circumstances. A few examples mentioned

were lockdowns, inmates fighting, or COVID-19 screenings during the pandemic. P3

stated "you just can't plan for those days, so it makes it difficult for everyone."

Theme 3: Negative Interactions

Another area prominently featured was negative interaction. This theme was addressed by all eight participants. Negative interaction was spoken of in the form of trusting staff, trusting other inmates, and an inmate's image within the prison setting. While no participants described negative interactions or concerns for safety with inmates, a few did mention personal bias. Despite the minor bias, the participants genuinely cared about their students and wanted them to be successful. The concern was not only for them to be successful after release but also for the remainder of their stay. Each participant made comments about how essential and rewarding their job is or was to them. Seven of the eight participants mentioned respect as the number one factor to working in the prison education environment. Nonetheless, that does not mean respect is always at the forefront of working in an institution.

"Sometimes it's scary to share things about your life that you've never spoken about before. So, sometimes it takes time to build that trust," said P3. P8 stated "the only other obstacle we really have is just people being scared that confidentiality is going to be broken. Somebody is going to go back and be like telling their business. They are all living here." It appeared that many inmates take a lot of time to open up, if ever at all.

Working in the prison education field, the participants have dealt with some of society's most demanding people. P4 described their position as taking all the emotionally disturbed children from schools and putting them into one classroom. Most inmates have some form of mental health history, which is hardly addressed in the institutions. Others have had a long history of struggles with education. Some inmates

cannot read or write; therefore, their personal experience in the classroom is negative. They are not likely to participate, especially if expected to read aloud, share writing, or answer questions. P5 gave the following statement

> You gotta understand you have a classroom of 25 you know, grown men who have had a history of failing in school or have a history of behavior problems in school and probably, in my opinion, have a lot of anxiety and trauma. You know school has just been one big failure for them. And so just to make them go back and fit into a traditional classroom again, there is, like, PTSD for most of them. If you're if you're afraid of speaking up and giving the wrong answer out loud in class, you know, you're a grown man. You don't want the teacher to ask you a question or a math problem if you don't understand it. Do you really want to do that in front of these other men who, you know, who are in opposing gangs and they're your enemies?

Being affiliated with a religious group or gang could also pose a negative interaction in the educational setting. Inmates involved in gangs, especially gang leaders, have a reputation to uphold. These individuals have a significantly less chance of participating, especially if they have had a terrible experience in school or a learning disability. They will not risk their image to participate in programs.

Another negative interaction mentioned frequently involved the relationship between the inmates and the guards. It was suggested that prisons' utmost concern is security. Everything else is behind that. Most of the educators worked in institutions where they felt it was run by military or police staff. P5 stated "the problem that I have is

that the prison is run by security, and they do not give a rat's ass about, you know, any other type of services." Four of the eight participants voiced that they felt disliked by many of the guards. This negative relationship carries over to the inmates when they need to come to classes and even when they need mental health services. The frustration was evident. P7 irritably said "they really don't give a damn. They are there to punish the inmates." P2 gave further examples

> You would think being in a prison that I would not have problems with them (inmates) showing up for the appointment, right?" Yeah. Well, l will ask him (the guard) to go get them and daily I get about 50% show up. (P2)

P5 also noted that "it's just, it is their interactions with officers."

The consensus was that many times it is not the inmates who are unwilling to class, but the guards are rugged about bringing them down. "They will say it's about security, but it takes them to open a cell door and they just don't feel like it," said P8. "Security controls the prison and these programs do not. That is the bottom line," voiced P2. Educational programming is second to security and likely below many other levels of institutional affairs. Cooperation is needed between all staff to make these programs successful. Everyone must see the importance of these programs. Inmates will avoid any further negative interaction, even if that means not getting medication, therapy, or education. They prefer to miss out on recreational time if it means they will be bullied by staff.

Table 2

Emerging Themes for RQ2

Research question	Theme
RQ2: What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs?	Incentives

Theme 1: Incentives

Incentives represented the theme most consistent across all participants. There were both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. Internal motivation extends from personal satisfaction. The reward or incentive is the satisfaction that comes from completing the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation represents engagement in action for its own sake (Cherry, 2020). The following statements provide evidence that inmates were intrinsically motivated to participate in educational programs:

I think it is maturity, typically more women are motivated or willing to participate. They hear friends talk about it and that motivates them, but it is because they talk good about it or have success so then they want to do it. (P1)

When they know you care about their success it motivates them. I care about their success because I look at them and I am like, man, all you needed was somebody in your corner and you could have been so much more successful. A lot of them have low self-esteem. A lot of (them) don't have self-confidence, you know, um, most important to be treated with human rights like you have the opportunity just to make better decisions in your life. (P2)

They really try to build stuff for inmates to help them have a life outside of here, like the drug recovery program. If they are motivated to get off drugs and want to change then they sign up. (P3)

Not ever being able to fit in, then, it decreases their motivation. If they feel respected and like they fit in, that is a good feeling. (P4)

There are those who are highly motivated and to really appreciate and value, um, coming up to mental health and having interactions. Some, you know what they perceive as you know, benefits to themselves, um, for it. And so they really aren't that motivated. It also varies from staff to staff because you have staff who it makes it enjoyable, and they can tell when you really care about them. Yeah, something I always say to new people who come and say, look, if you really show and convey that you care about their well-being and that you have the confidence to work with them on dealing with their issue, they will sense that and they will open up to you and really tell you what the real problems are. However, if they sense that you are just there for the paycheck and they are just cattle going through a system, I mean, you're just checking off boxes on a form. They will also know that, and they are not only going to tell you so much. Their motivation depends on if they sense that you care. (P5)

Um, the other factor is being able to separate the sharks from the guppies. Um, when it comes to inmates because you have inmates, that are predators and who are bullies, you know, then there are inmates who really are there who really want to make a change and want to change their lives. (P6)

It is a frame of mind. I mean, I have inmates and they are lifers. I have students who are in there for life. So, it's a choice every day whether they want to educate and be educated. (P7)

When they think what they are learning in my program is relatable to the street also or outside the prison. Because for a while there, they felt like, oh, we got old information. Information is not applicable on the streets. When it makes sense to their life they will participate. (P8)

On the other hand, extrinsically motivated behaviors are performed to gain something from others or avoid specific outcomes. The outcome is separate from the activity itself. The reward or incentive is typically social and emotional (Cherry, 2020). The following statements provide evidence that inmates were extrinsically motivated to participate in educational programs:

Most of them are pretty eager on participating in the program because it gives them something to do. They can get extra hygiene, or even, um, an extra visit. (P1)

If they finished the year long program, they could get what's called a 90-day dunk, meaning they get 90 days off their sentence. If they're in the year long program depending upon the sentence, they can either get a day off a month or five days a month off their sentence. So, if you're looking at somebody who gets five days a month, reduced from their sentence for being in the year long program or just being in school, multiply that by five, that is 60. (P2)

The days off the sentence is definitely a big motivator to get people in. So,

depending on their charges they can get days off for each month they participate,

and also some of them can get 90 days off their sentence if they complete the

entire six months. That is a huge motivator. Also, there is a community transition

program. If you do that, then when you leave, we hook you up with somebody in

the community to really help you transition back home. And then another one is

the Vivitrol shot. So, if you have an opioid or an alcohol diagnosis and you do this

group, you can get the Vivitrol shot before you even leave prison and then

continue it on the outside. (P3)

The environment that these guys and women go back to really are so disturbed

and dysfunctional that many for many of them that it is hard, uh, for them to stay,

um, connected with, you know, the productivity that most of us would think and

take for granted. So, when they're in prison, they just look at it as okay, I just

have to sit tight for a while and do my time. And then when I get out, I know what

I have waiting out for me that's going to pay me what appears to be a lot of

money. Even though it's a high-risk behavior, there's an immediate reward that

comes with that financially. But they are also elevated risks, you know, could be

death or reincarceration. So, sometimes they are motivated to do stuff here to

have help when they get out. (P4)

They're hungry for it. They want it without the burden and obstacles, you know,

they have to go through to get it. Uh, they want the program. They want help.

They want education. You know, there are 30 years old and they don't even know

what they want to do when they grow up. You know, that's just a common issue.
And because nobody has ever really worked with them and figuring out what
they're good at and what they can do and how they can earn a living, you know,
um, they're just lost very lost. And so, they're hungry for help every day. Most
inmates are willing to participate in, and they want to grow, and they want to
learn. Um, but they're looking for, you know, the people who actually care and
were motivated to help them, and not just somebody who's burnout and cynical.
(P5)

Some take advantage to get into these programs because they know they're going
out there with other inmates from other blocks. It's their way of getting out there
to talk to them, uh, organize stuff. Sometimes they're motivated if they know they
get to see their boyfriend or crap like that. They just wanna hang out and have a
good time. It's changed a lot. Uh, used to be when I first started working there,
um, they would get sentenced for 15 years in prison, but their time would say,
like, 10 to 15. They could do up to 15 years. But if they behave and they get down
and they stay out of trouble, stuff like that, then they go home in 10. And that was
big. So, they come to prison and they're doing 10 years, and no matter what
they're not getting out early, then there's no incentive. (P6)

It's a matter of the instructor and getting them to buy into it. A lot of the guys that
are in my class are communicating with their families at home and some of their
kids are doing the same work that they are. So, that motivates them to come if
they know I will let them communicate at home to help their kids with their work.

I also have incentive packages. They can choose, like an extra day, commissary,

hygiene, or take a picture that they can send home for family. (P7)

Sometimes they're motivated by freedom. You could go to a level of three camp,

which would give you more freedoms as far as, like, moving around. Those

programs make them more employable when they get out. So having things that

are more interactive. (P8)

Summary

Chapter 4 described the study findings and the perceptions and observations of

prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education

programs. This study presented three themes regarding RQ1 and one theme to answer

RQ2, which revealed the underpinnings for participation and motivation in institutional

education. The four themes were a) time commitment, b) access to programs, c) negative

interactions, and d) incentives.

An evaluation of the findings outlined the prominent themes, which emerged from

this study. The participant's experiences, along with their willingness to articulate the

intimate details of their position, informed the study data and provided the basis for the

phenomenological narrative from the semi-structured interviews. This current study

captured both positive and negative aspects of prison education programs, which can be

used as a vehicle for change to empower inmates with the necessary skills to return as

successful members of society and reduce subsequent reincarceration. I interviewed a

total of eight past and present prison educators for this study. Chapter 5 provides the

reader with an interpretation of my findings outlined in this chapter. The limitations of

the study, recommendations, and implications for social change will also be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Exploring participants' perceptions allowed me to gain further insight into how prison educators interpret inmate participation and motivation. The nature of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. I conducted individual interviews with prison educators. Personal interviews are a valuable technique used to explore a person's perception of a given phenomenon, contributing to in-depth data collection (Frances et al., 2009). Qualitative methodology was consistent with exploring how increasing inmate participation and motivation in educational programs may reduce their chances to reoffend, which was the focus of this study.

Chapter 4 included the findings of the study. The volunteers who participated in this study were eager to share that the programs they have taught provide invaluable tools for inmates, such as instilling problem-solving skills, self-awareness, communication skills, and employability. These skills were refined through interactions between the inmates and the educators. Findings indicated that from the educator's perspective, inmates who were motivated and participated in educational programs had more success reintegrating into society upon release and less chance of recidivism. These disclosures resulted in developing four themes that answered the research questions posed. Themes to answer RQ1 included time commitment, access to programs, and negative interaction. The theme to answer RQ2 was incentives.

Although not explicitly targeted during the interviews, issues regarding roadblocks to prison education were also identified in this study. Educators recalled their experiences teaching within an institutional setting, revealing the pros and cons. I discovered that the inmates have strains surrounding education. Also, the educators often lack support from guards and administration and have little access to the appropriate supplies to keep up with instruction on the outside. Nonetheless, most educators felt that inmates were appreciative of their efforts in the classroom. Even though challenges were presented, rapport with inmates leads to perseverance in the classroom. It did not often appear that inmates were treated with any humanity; therefore, educators foreshadowed a change and usually provided hope. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings. Also included are the study's limitations, recommendations, social change implications, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

In Chapter 4, I discussed patterns of meaning in the study findings, which resulted in themes that offered insight into the research questions posed. Essential in this qualitative study, which relied on interviews to collect data, was the difficulty of verifying each participant's accounting. Interviewees could have been deceptive, truthful, forthcoming, or not willing to disclose information fully. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative findings can be described as emergent and may change once the research process starts. Semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide participants with a platform to report their experiences regarding the topic; however, it was up to each participant to determine the degree to which they

communicated these lived experiences. Participants appeared motivated to extend knowledge in this discipline by addressing the gap in the literature regarding prison education programs, such as motives for participation, which could impact recidivism rates. I reassured all participants that their identities would be confidential.

The three themes that emerged from the data collected in the study to assist with answering RQ1 included time commitment, access to programs, and negative interactions. The theme that emerged to help with answering RQ2 was incentives. All four themes aligned with the peer-reviewed literature and research. Underlying the four emerging themes was the discovery of frustration surrounding the roadblocks to prison education. Seven of the eight participants voiced frustration at one point or another during the interview regarding what they perceived as issues with the entire system.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation in prison education programs? Most participants disclosed that inmates are eager and willing to participate in prison education programs because education can be a gateway to social and economic mobility.

Research Question 2

What are the observations of prison educators concerning motivational factors to increase inmate participation in prison education programs? All of the participants determined that incentives, small or large, could motivate inmates to participate in prison education programs.

The framework for this study was based upon Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory. The opportunity theory is a structural theory that refers to the midrange level of society, including the institutional level. This theory addresses the impact of a lack of opportunities upon forming a criminal subculture (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). The findings from the current study supported this theory. Lack of opportunity to participate in prison education programs was a popular topic that led to discovering the three main themes: time commitment, access to programs, and negative interactions.

Time commitment affects participation in education programs, according to most of the participants. According to Panitsides and Moussiou (2019), escaping the everyday prison environment and possible sentence reduction are motivating factors for participation in educational programs. These findings were also consistent with Parson and Langenback's (1993) findings that inmates study to have something to do to pass the time, otherwise referred to as activity orientation.

Five of the eight current participants mentioned that inmates participate for something to do to pass the time. P3 talked about how inmates typically look forward to getting out of their cells or away from common areas to engage in more thoughtful conversation. Inmates have time. The bottom line is that they are simply serving time. Opportunities to escape a monotonous routine are highly sought by the inmates. Avoidance posture, or the preference of studying to avoid a less pleasant activity, is also deemed a motivating factor (Jones et al., 2013). P1, P2, P4, P7, and P8 mentioned the inmate's preference to engage in educational programs over so much downtime on the compounds. Conversely, P3 told contradicting stories about how inmates would rather lie

in their beds, hang out with boyfriends or girlfriends, or work than spend their time in classrooms.

According to BPI (2020), inmates have constant interruptions, such as five headcounts per day, that create chaos and make it difficult for students to focus in the classroom. All current participants mentioned the ever-changing schedules in the prison setting. P1 gave many examples of interruptions that might occur throughout the day, which cannot be accounted for when planning, such as fights on the compound that create security threats, transfer inmates, or someone being sick. Whether positive or negative, time commitment proved to be a key reason for participation in educational programs.

Educational opportunities vary from state to state, as well as from one facility to the next. Each program is unique, serving a variety of inmates and having different characteristics. Not only must inmates comply with daily routines and boundaries that restrict their freedom to participate in programs, but inmates often lack access to these programs and the necessary tools for success. The COVID-19 pandemic was the most discussed issue that recently restricted access to programs. "They may do work in their cells or something like that, but not in the classrooms," said P4. The COVID-19 pandemic was a hindrance to educational access worldwide, with the prison systems being no exception.

RAND (2018) suggested several structural problems, both systematic and statewide, that hinder increased inmate participation. Therefore, states should take the necessary steps to ensure the benefits of correctional education programs are obtained. According to Bender (2018), instituting a funding formula, like public education systems,

directly connected to inmate attendance would increase numbers in the prison classroom. If funding were dependent on inmate participation, prison systems would work more diligently to staff them appropriately and provide the necessary supplies.

Funding, in general, was a consistent subject matter in the current study. Five of the eight participants had previously taught in public education sectors and confirmed RAND's (2018) idea that institutional education should be approached more like public education systems. Two participants mentioned hiring freezes, and although this was likely to have happened in the public schools, the consensus was that prisons would be at the bottom of the priority list to reinstate funding to fill positions. This creates a domino effect of "looking good on paper," according to P5, because institutions cannot convene many programs that may have once been offered. Lack of funding, lack of employees, and lack of programs collectively create a formula of overall unavailability or lack of access to programs. This finding confirmed Mohammed and Mohomed's (2015) research that some prisons have educational programs and policies in place, but not all prisons actively operate many of these programs.

This finding affirmed systematic issues mentioned in the review of the literature. Research suggested that programs are primarily available to those closer to their release dates, and the findings of the current study confirmed this. Inmates will often go several years before receiving any type of program, apart from pre-GED, GED, or Adult Basic Education programs. Many current participants revealed that some inmates could serve years before entering a program. P4 and P8 talked about how long waiting lists for programs can be for a variety of reasons. This lack of access to programs leads to a lot of

unproductive time. P7 mentioned "an idle mind is a devil's workshop." These inmates are left with nothing but time and often do not have the option to exercise their time in more productive ways.

The concern for inhumane treatment of incarcerated individuals resulted in prison reform. My literature review suggested that education was at the forefront of this reform and promised to transform inmates into productive members of society. The current study showed that education, despite the reform effort, is not a primary concern in prisons. Various studies have shown that correctional education offers many benefits to inmates and prison systems when good programs are implemented. However, prison education programs are provided to only a tiny percentage of the inmate population. Furthermore, there are several shortcomings of the programs that do exist, which limit their effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates. Negative interactions repeatedly surfaced throughout the interviews in the current study.

Research indicated that incarcerated individuals are far less educated than the general population. Inmates generally have lower basic skills, which negatively impact their everyday demands of life and employment. They also have higher unemployment rates or underemployment (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The current study's findings confirmed these ideas. Several of the participants spoke about inmates who refuse to participate because school has proven to be unsuccessful for them. Learning difficulties are persistent over time. Most inmates who have struggled in school tend to struggle during these programs. This creates an environment of uncertainty, vulnerability, and distrust. P1 told stories about inmates who refused to participate, but once they were

talked to privately, the fear extended from their previous struggles in school. Many inmates have a social status to uphold. They often choose to maintain this social status at the expense of their educational opportunities. These findings were consistent with Behan's (2014) analysis that incarcerated students participate in education for social reasons. Aside from these worries came the constant disconnect between the guards and inmates and the guards and support staff. Human beings are naturally conflict avoidant; therefore, when guards refuse to bring inmates to class or health appointments, sometimes even threatening them, this drives a wedge between inmates and their education.

Roth and Manger (2014) suggested that many inmates have a genuine interest in learning simply for the sake of learning and self-improvement, which has been identified in other respective studies. The current study confirmed this idea in six of the eight interviews. Motivational factors were reported in two primary forms throughout these interviews: intrinsic and extrinsic. Inmates care about their prison life, which can be a motivating factor to encourage participation in education programs. Some of these prison life factors could be canteen, housing, visitation, and prison pay (Prison Studies Project, 2020). All of the current participants affirmed this previous research by listing at least one, typically more, of these incentives. Furthermore, it was clear throughout these interviews that inmates were not participating for no good reason at all. Intrinsic or extrinsic factors heightened participation. This finding was consistent with Bender's (2018) suggestion that increasing incentives for inmate participation would be just as effective as restructuring funding.

Research by the Prison Studies Project (2020) suggested that incentives are essential because they improve the security of the prisons, education program outcomes, and society. With a well-designed incentives program, it is likely that inmate participation would escalate, which would assist in their transition back to the community, reducing recidivism (Bender, 2018). The current study affirmed this idea. Whether the motivation extends from intrinsic needs or extrinsic desires, all participants named incentives as motivating factors for participation. Many inmates, according to these interviews, enjoy participating in programs. They are eager to learn and willing to change, and they want opportunities to set them up for future success. For some, attending programs equates to early release. For others, it is simply to pass the time. Extra hygiene kits were one of the most frequently mentioned incentives. P1 explained that something as simple as a better soap may never cross your mind to the outside world, but to inmates who have the bare minimum, getting soap, razors, or shaving cream might be what motivates them to do something extra. Reduced time was another substantial motivator. For the inmates who want to change their lives, the educational programs have multiple benefits. Not only are they credited days off of their sentence for participation, but they are also receiving skills and certifications to assist them when they transition back to society. Inmates can spend several years in prison. They become cut off to the outside and sometimes stagnant, and the world around them continues to evolve. These programs help reduce the fear of keeping up with society in a productive manner. As P5 stated, "they're hungry for it." This was reported in seven of the eight interviews.

Limitations of the Study

Phenomenological studies can require an understanding of broad philosophical assumptions identified by the researcher (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). In a qualitative study, the findings are not universally true for all individuals or all societies (Houghton et al., 2013). I chose participants who had experienced the phenomenon to explore their common understandings. This phenomenological study provided a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the lived experiences of prison educators.

The small sample size was a limitation of this study, making it difficult to gather data from a truly representative sample. While this study presented valuable data to the prison systems, it does not determine all education issues in varying institutions. The subjects all resided within a defined geographical location, so the study result may not pertain to individuals living in different societies with differing cultures. All eight participants validated transcripts to ensure the results were objective and valid throughout the research process. To improve dependability and transferability of the findings, I used an audit trail. I provided a complete and detailed description of the procedures to allow future researchers to apply the conclusions to their studies (Statistics Solutions, 2018). Nonetheless, the two research questions can be used to conduct the study in different areas of the country or anywhere a prison offers education, and participants are willing to participate.

Participation was another limitation in this study. The first reason was reluctance because of the stigma or not wanting their employers to find out that they had given out information perceived as confidential. Although all participants were ensured that no

identifying information would be used, that was not enough to secure additional interviews. Finding former educators in the prison system was a loophole utilized to gain my final participants. The second issue regarding participation was due to the Stay-At-Home orders from the pandemic. These orders allowed only essential travel and work. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a rippling effect of problems in many workplaces. Many prisons were short-staffed; therefore, some prison educators refused to participate due to time constraints. Others agreed to participate but then did not follow through. To battle the pandemic limitations, interviews were conducted via phone instead of face-to-face. Phone interviews created a comfortable and safe environment for both myself and the participants and reduced any travel time for both parties.

Educator bias was a concern to this study, considering multiple variables, such as burnout, jaded to the system, or negative attitudes. Bias only appeared in one of the eight interviews. This participant had been in the prison system the longest, which could have contributed to bias. I was vigilant of verbal communication during the interviews to avoid this limitation.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, some technical errors posed minor concerns. First, I used a call recording application to record the interviews. This application automatically transcribed the interviews and created a document. When reading through the transcription, there were a good bit of errors and information lost in translation. I played each audio recording while simultaneously going through the written transcript and correcting the mistakes. The other technical issue was related to the QDA software. This software offered a free trial of 14 days. The transcribed data were

uploaded into the software during that 14-day trial and data analysis had begun. Although the program stated that data would not be lost after the free trial ended, I was locked out and could not access the data files until purchasing the program. Once the program was extended, I still had issues retrieving the previously started project and had to redo that work. To guarantee that this was not an issue in the future, I saved the data analysis and future work to a double password-protected hard drive.

Finally, a limitation for most qualitative studies is that they do not yield as much measurable evidence as quantitative studies. This is especially true of a phenomenological study exploring a gap in the literature established by this study. While the qualitative design implemented in this study provided insight into how prison educators personally interpret inmate participation and motivation surrounding prison education programs, a quantitative analysis may establish a better representation of this population. It could also yield a larger sample size. The findings from this study were based on the qualitative interpretation of the shared experiences of the eight participants. The study followed Walden University's IRB process. The participants were assigned a number to keep their identifying information confidential. The participants were asked to sign informed consent agreements, which signified their willingness to volunteer and consent to the interviews. The document also ensured their privacy through binding regulatory and legal guidelines.

Recommendations

This phenomenological study aimed to address the gap in the literature concerning inmate participation and motivation surrounding prison education. These

findings encompassed data obtained from semi-structured interviews of eight present or past prison educators. Identifying information was not disclosed to safeguard the participant's employment. The eight educators provided invaluable insight regarding how participation and motivation in prison programs were perceived through their experiences.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study guide the recommendations for practice in this section. The themes presented in this study surfaced from the participant's observations and perceptions of meanings that they assigned to personal experiences teaching in prison education. Prison education programs have been lightly supported throughout prison reform to instill inmates with the necessary skills to transition back into society. This data was revealing because not every inmate will choose to participate in educational programs, and this study offered conclusions as to why. For some, participating is a way to stay engaged and sane. For others, it is genuinely to better themselves. Human beings long for socialization, happiness, and simple connections. Providing programs to those who are likely at their lowest point in life seems obvious. All participants expressed the value of prison education and how inmates could ultimately reshape their lives to create a better society. The issue was not the lack of want on the inmate's part, but the scarcity of programs available to them and the lack of attention to combat this issue. Prison education should be higher on the priority list when speaking of prison reform. Inmates need to have access to programs not only immediately but for the entirety of their sentence. We speak of some of the most troubled individuals with a vigor past, yet there

is a lack of opportunity for growth and change. Prison educators need to have more access to materials that are more comparable to external education programs. The world is evolving, but due to safety being the biggest concern, prison education programs appear ancient. As much effort as public-school systems put into hiring "highly qualified" educators, the recruitment of prison educators should match that, if not exceed, due to the population they will teach. A bridge between public educators and prison educators could be formed to discuss requirements and expectations and support one another in sharing skills across the scope of programs offered in different facilities. Although inmates undergo initial assessments upon entering prison, educational assessments should be mandatory to meet the needs of each inmate and provide them with the best possible rehabilitation. Many educators voiced concerns about participation due to a lack of previous education. Knowing an inmate's academic level could allow prison educators the opportunity to serve their students better.

These insights provide knowledge to communities, family, friends, and other institutions about why inmates are or are not participating and what factors are most prevalent in motivating inmates to participate in prison education programs. Likewise, the lived experiences provided by this study's participants provide direction for additional research to improve the practices of prison educators and institutional programs and policies alike. Previous research offered tremendous literature that prison education programs significantly reduced recidivism rates. The data garnered from this study aligns with the current body of knowledge. These findings will contribute to improved programming and increased participation and motivation amongst inmates.

Recommendations for Research

As previously mentioned, qualitative studies pose limitations that quantitative studies do not. Due to the nature of phenomenological studies, findings based on the data are more subjective and interpretive. It is recommended to mirror this qualitative study with quantitative research to yield more objective and measurable results. While this study aimed to explore reasons and gain understanding, statistical data could produce more conclusive evidence related to actual inmates participating in programs versus those who do not. There is a lack of literature pertaining to the perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Thus, a quantitative study could promote a more conclusive foundation of knowledge surrounding this topic.

Future research should examine the systematic issues surrounding prison education programs, one being funding. This could entail exploring religious organizations that offer charitable programs to support inmates' transition back into the community. Also, private for-profit confinement facilities that utilize taxpayer's dollars should be investigated further to determine whether these facilities offer educational programs, what they might offer, how much they're spending on education, and the program's quality and how it impacts recidivism rates. This information could be invaluable in improving prison education programs.

This study was conducted during a worldwide pandemic. This pandemic created limitations to this study, and it was proven that prison education programs were significantly impacted. While the outside school systems could convert to an online

platform, this was not true for the prison population. Future research could evaluate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected prison education programs and the lack of protective measures for inmates to safeguard their opportunities for betterment. Outside education programs will continue with some of the changes executed during the pandemic. As a result, what changes were or will be made to prison education?

Lastly, future research should explore the mental health of inmates. Education was not introduced in the United States prison system as a form of rehabilitation until roughly 1798. Towards the end of the 18th century, harsh punishment was eradicated by the law, and educators begin to make noble efforts to rehabilitate offenders through education (Teeters, 1955). Before this reform, prisoners were brutally punished and endured severe and inhumane punishment. The thought process was that this type of punishment would dissuade individuals from a criminal lifestyle (Reagan & Stroughton, 1976). While brutal punishment may not exist, inmates are deprived of appropriate mental health.

For inmates, not having access to basic psychological human needs is inhumane. Education, along with appropriate therapies and additional programs, falls into this category. Many participants spoke to the mental health of their students. It was no surprise that fair mental health status waivered in this setting; however, not much seemed to address this substantial issue. This research could entail implementing various programs available to inmates to meet these basic psychological human needs.

Implications

According to Walden University (2013), social change is a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies. Ultimately, social change improves both human and social conditions. The dissertation topic of reducing recidivism through prison education programs advances the betterment of society. Prison education programs can better society by providing opportunities to inmates to make a positive change in their lives to become productive members of the community upon release. Education can be a gateway to social and economic mobility. Prison education programs are a cost-effective way to reduce crime, which leads to long-term benefits for society (Bender, 2018).

The findings from this study have substantial implications for positive social change and could be helpful for prison educators, prison administration, inmates, their families, and the community. This study provides awareness surrounding prison education and how beneficial it proves to be for inmates. Although prison educational programs require funding upfront, there are considerable long-term economic benefits. For example, taxpayers will end up saving 4 to 5 dollars for every dollar spent on prison education. These educational programs also allow inmates to become competitive within the job market, spurring economic activity. Additionally, providing these inmates with the tools to become productive members of society will decrease their chances of depending on government programs upon release (Bender, 2018). These are the reasons that the findings of my dissertation topic contribute to positive social change.

Methodological Implications

      I implemented a qualitative phenomenological design. The tool used for data collection, a semi-structured interview, was invaluable in exploring the sophisticated details of participants' lived experiences, ultimately fostering an extensive foundation of information that could be used during data analysis. The research questions explored the perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. As a result of this study, the lived experiences of the eight participants were described comprehensively and allow for a more in-depth understanding of the positive impacts of prison education.

Theoretical Implications

      Theory development was not part of this research design. Therefore, a phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences of prison educators was chosen. I conducted interviews and analyzed the responses to open-ended questions concerning the lived experiences as prison educators. Individual interviews are a valuable technique used to explore a person's perception of a given phenomenon, contributing to in-depth data collection (Frances et al., 2009). Focusing on creating additional opportunities geared towards success were consistent with Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory, as lack of education and job skills are critical factors in recidivism (RAND, 2019). The data from this study confirmed that lack of funding, lack of educators, lack of trusting relationships between staff and inmates, and lack of access to curriculum and materials are significant factors that hinder prison education opportunities, which tie into Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) opportunity theory. Qualitative

research is consistent with exploring how inmate participation and motivation in educational programs may reduce their chances to re-offend, which provides innovative knowledge to all stakeholders.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and observations of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs. Education provides inmates with increased opportunities post-release and can reduce recidivism. This research was necessary to enhance our understanding of the positive impacts of prison education. The objective of this study was to bridge the gap in the literature related to prison education explored through the perceptions of prison educators. The study's findings corroborated what had already been established in the peer-reviewed literature associated with perceptions of prison educators regarding inmate participation and motivation in prison education programs.

Ultimately, education gives people a voice, opens doors for a better future, and can restore an individual's self-esteem and social competence. There are many systematic issues seen within the criminal justice system. While providing additional educational opportunities for inmates may not fix these issues, it appears to be a better way of utilizing taxpayer money than funding the return of these individuals in the future (Bender, 2018). Horace Mann, a pioneer of schools in the 19th century, once called education the "great equalizer of the conditions of men." However, the inverse is also true. Those who do not have the opportunity to receive an appropriate education will likely end up on the lifelong gap between employment, earnings, and even life

expectancy (Duncan, 2018). Education is only the great equalizer if the most vulnerable individuals, including the incarcerated, can obtain it.

The individual and unique experiences of each participant yielded significant themes, which surfaced during data analysis. The findings concluded that many inmates are willing and eager to participate in programs; however, there is a lack of opportunity. Educational programs provide inmates with additional skills from what they already had, and for some, they provide a foundation of basic knowledge that did not previously exist. These skills are essential in the transition back to the community because they give the inmates more favorable outcomes, ultimately reducing recidivism rates.

Seven of the eight participants expressed that teaching in an institution with a vulnerable population is rewarding. P7 stated "I have the chance to really help someone change their life," while P5 discussed the importance of having even just one person in your life who believes in you. For many of these inmates, relationships have been complicated. They lack basic life skills, which is why many of them are incarcerated. Having the opportunity to work with or educate inmates who have hit rock bottom was highly valued amongst the participants. Each participant willingly participated in this study because they viewed it as a way to cultivate change. The participants took the opportunity to voice concerns and attempted to be the change that they want to see in prison education.

While there is plenty of literature regarding institutional education, this topic should continue to be studied. Lack of opportunity is at the forefront of the issue; therefore, additional research should address strategies to mitigate these shortcomings.

Cutting prison costs by investing in educational opportunities provides the highest benefits to society, both morally and logically. Increased educational opportunities for inmates ensure that they have equal opportunities to excel in the future (Bender, 2018).

The United States of America is one of the most profound countries globally, yet the leader amongst all other countries in the highest prison population. According to The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) (2020), an estimated 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the United States. Previous studies have indicated that recidivism rates and crime reduction are correlated with higher education while incarcerated. Thus, further validating the need for prison reform to include educational opportunities.

Statistics indicate that nearly 95 out of 100 of these incarcerated individuals will be released; however, 76.6% of ex-prisoners will be rearrested within 5 years. This percentage makes the United States the leader amongst all other countries in recidivism rates; therefore, programs and tools must be developed to effectively reduce these numbers (IHEP, 2020; Prison Studies Project, 2020). If there is ever a time for a change, it is now. Rehabilitation versus punishment must be addressed at all levels of the system. Are safety concerns so prevalent that education cannot be attained, or do prison systems operate on the verge of modern-day slavery? It is simple math. The more rehabilitated inmates, the fewer inmates recidivate, the closer society becomes to being whole and just.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

What is your teaching background?

What certifications do you currently possess?

What skills or special training were necessary to become a prison educator?

If you have taught elsewhere, how, if any, has your teaching style changed?

What do you feel is the immediate goal of prison education?

Tell me about a typical day as an educator in the prison setting?

What educational programs are available at this prison?

In what ways are inmates made aware of the programs available to them?

How often are inmates offered the opportunity to participate or join a program?

What programs are advertised, but not implemented?

What are some reasons programs are not implemented?

How involved are the inmates in the program(s)/class(es) you currently teach?

What are some factors that increase inmate participation?

Can you give me an example of an inmate, or situation that demonstrates one of these

factors you've described?

What are some factors that decrease inmate participation?

Can you give me an example of an inmate, or situation that demonstrates one of these

factors you've described?

What do you do as an educator to engage with your students, the inmates?

What tactics do you use in the classroom to reinforce the benefits of participation in

educational programs?

Is inmate success in educational programs important to you?

What makes their success important to you?

How do you feel that their success or program completion could benefit society?

Can you give me an example of a positive outcome from an inmate?

What did that experience mean to you?

Can you give me an example of a negative outcome from an inmate?

What did that experience mean to you?

What are some obstacles of teaching in a prison?

Can you tell me about your access to curriculum and materials?

What do you find rewarding about teaching in a prison?

What is your relationship like with the inmate students?

Do you have any personal biases that could affect your teaching in a prison?

Why might someone prefer teaching in a prison setting?

Tell me about the opportunities you have to make a difference in prison education?

Do you feel that you take full advantage of the opportunity to make a difference in their

success?

What can you tell me about education and recidivism?

With that in mind, in what ways can you as a prison educator increase educational

participation rates?

Tell me about any safety concerns that you may have as a prison educator?

Can you give me an example of a time you have felt unsafe?

What is the most important thing you focus upon in the classroom?

Can you give me an example of expectations set forth by administration?

Tell me about your relationship with prison administration or the curriculum director?

Can you give me an example of a time you may have had to address educational concerns with administration?

What supports do you feel might make prison education more successful?

Can you provide me with an example of how that/those supports aren't provided?

What would having all of the necessary supports in place mean to you as a prison educator?

What advice can you offer to someone who's contemplating teaching in the prison system?

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your opinion as to why inmates aren't accessing or motivated to participate in educational programs?

Closing

I wanted to thank you so much for your time, as well as your honesty and openness. The information gathered is valuable and greatly assists in this research study. It is my hope that this information can be used to increase inmate participation and motivation in educational programs so that they can become productive members of society upon release. I will contact you via your preferred method (phone, email, face-to-face, mail) to verify the accuracy of the information you have provided by sharing with you the findings of my interviews.