



EXAMINING THE SUPERVISION OF STUDENT PRISONERS IN DISTANCE E-LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Purpose of this study was to examine the educational encounters of twelve incarcerated individuals at a prison in Namibia, with a specific focus on their involvement in educational activities throughout their incarceration. The participants originated from diverse vocational backgrounds, encompassing professions such as Soldier, Police Officer, Civil Servant, Teacher, Mechanic, and Farmer. Furthermore, there was a limited number of individuals who were jobless at the time of the verdict. Method: data was obtained through audio-recorded interviews and subsequently transcribed word for word by a skilled transcriber. Analysis: The author employed an interpretive framework to examine the transcriptions aiming to reveal underlying trends and acquire insight into the motivations, difficulties, and viewpoints of the offenders in relation to their educational pursuits. Prisoners perceive imprisonment as a chance to enhance themselves via education, which they regard to improve their lives upon release. Having access to essential resources such as laptops, printers, and study materials is vital for their academic endeavors. However, incarcerated students face significant obstacles in their academic endeavors due to intermittent access to electricity and limited study hours. Findings: It was found that to succeed in remote education individuals must demonstrate self-discipline, efficient time management abilities and self-motivation, given there is a lack of direct oversight and regulated environments. Distance e-learning is generally acknowledged and esteemed for its exceptional degree of flexibility. Although incarcerated individuals face difficulties in speaking and receiving prompt replies, they are afforded the chance to pursue academic education while serving their prison sentences.

Keywords: *student prisoners, distance e-learning, supervision, incarceration education, case study.*

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the methods and protocols employed in supervising incarcerated student offenders who are engaged in remote e-learning programs. The integration of education into the prison system presents unique challenges and opportunities, particularly when contemplating the implementation of remote e-learning for jailed individuals. This study investigates the supervision and educational encounters of jailed students who are engaging in remote e-learning while serving sentences in a prison in Namibia. In order to effectively help incarcerated students in their educational pursuits, it is important to understand the dynamics of supervision and support, as education plays a vital role in reducing recidivism and encouraging rehabilitation (Behan, 2014; Vacca, 2004). The aim of this research is to assess the effectiveness of current supervisory methods, identify challenges faced by student prisoners, and explore strategies to improve the use of distance e-learning for this specific group.

A significant impediment to the incorporation of education into the correctional system is the issue of security and control (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Prisons are designed to limit movement and control access, which might provide challenges for students who want to engage in distance e-learning. The supervisory methods in prisons can vary greatly, with some facilities having dedicated educational staff and resources, while others rely on correctional officials with limited experience in educational support (Coley & Barton, 2006). Imprisoned individuals may face unique personal and logistical challenges that hinder their progress in schooling. The challenges encompass limited technological accessibility, disruptions in their educational setting, and competing obligations that impede their ability to allocate time and concentration effectively (Gonzalez & Alvarez, 2020). When implemented effectively, distance e-learning has the capacity to overcome these challenges by providing increased flexibility and personalized support (Zgoba et al., 2008). This study seeks to offer valuable insights into the convergence of education, technology, and incarceration in Namibia through the utilization of a comprehensive case study methodology. This study seeks to provide insight into the effectiveness of current practices and identify areas for improvement by analyzing the specific methods of supervision and the experiences of jailed students participating in remote e-learning. Ultimately, the outcomes could offer significant knowledge for policymakers and

prison officials on the efficient incorporation and assistance of educational initiatives for incarcerated individuals. Consequently, this could enhance their chances of achieving successful rehabilitation and reintegrating into society.

Literature Review

Supervision Strategies and Practices for Supporting Student Prisoners in Distance E-Learning Programs

Imprisoned individuals face significant challenges in accessing educational opportunities, which can have a profound impact on their personal development, rehabilitation, and successful reintegration into society upon release. Distance education programs have emerged as a viable answer to this issue, as they can provide incarcerated students with the necessary flexibility and accessibility to pursue higher education while in prison. However, the effective implementation and upkeep of these projects require intentional supervision strategies and procedures.

Enacting a collaborative approach to supervise pupils who are jailed

Establishing a collaborative partnership among correctional officials, educators, and incarcerated students is crucial (Costelloe & Warner, 2014; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Facilitating open and clear communication while fostering trust to develop a shared understanding of program goals and the need of providing assistance to students. In order to cultivate a sense of ownership and encourage active involvement, it is advantageous to involve incarcerated students in the decision-making process (Behan, 2014; Gehring, 2000). Employing a collaborative approach can offer significant benefits in terms of overseeing and advancing the professional growth of prison educators. The core components of this method, as outlined by Burke and Fessler (1983), involve recognizing growth requirements, delivering feedback, internalizing and achieving agreement, and formulating a course of action. These components can be improved by involving multiple stakeholders in the educational system, including professionals, administrators, students, parents, and colleagues.

In the prison environment, the evaluation of educators' developmental needs can be improved by incorporating input from other stakeholders. Estep and Roberts (2015) argue that prison administrators and program coordinators provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and professional development needs of educators working within the correctional system.

Furthermore, jailed students can offer useful insights into their educational experiences, thereby aiding in the identification of areas requiring enhancement (Behan, 2014). Prison educators derive significant advantages from obtaining continuous feedback from diverse sources, including students, colleagues, and administrators. Informal feedback from pupils and feedback received through parents or guardians can provide useful insights, in addition to the formal observation and feedback systems, within prison settings. By adopting this all-encompassing method of feedback, prison educators can enhance their comprehension of their strengths and identify areas where they can make improvements. For the collaborative approach to be effective, prison educators need to be open to self-reflection and willing to accept and support the feedback they receive. To facilitate optimal growth and development, it is crucial to establish a supportive and non-intimidating environment. By engaging in reflective practice and openly addressing areas that require improvement, instructors will experience a sense of security and confidence (Allred, 2009). Establishing a culture characterized by trust and mutual respect between instructors and the broader jail community can aid in facilitating this process. The collaborative approach places emphasis on creating and executing customized action plans to address the unique areas of enhancement for prison educators. The formulation of these initiatives should entail cooperation with the instructor, administrators, and potentially jailed students or their delegates (Muth, 2008). This collaborative process ensures that the action plan is tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the prison educator, hence increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and professional growth.

Implementing a collaborative approach to supervising prison educators can lead to improved professional development and superior instructional techniques within correctional facilities. Prison educators can enhance their skills and better address the educational needs of incarcerated individuals by involving various stakeholders in the process of identifying growth needs, gathering feedback, assimilating information, and creating action plans. This approach allows them to receive comprehensive support and guidance.

Recognizing the diverse needs and backgrounds of incarcerated students is crucial (Harlow, 2003; Vacca, 2004). Designing personalized educational strategies and adjusting supervisory approaches to accommodate individual learning preferences, challenges, and goals. Providing academic support, coaching, and tutoring to improve student progress and success (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Moeller et al., 2013). It is vital to guarantee that pupils are provided with dependable and up-to-date technology, such as laptops, tablets, and internet connection (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Phelps & Zahn, 2002). Creating dedicated educational settings

within the correctional facility that encourage focused learning and collaborative work (Lockitt, 2011; Phelps & Zahn, 2002). Creating a supportive and inspiring educational atmosphere for incarcerated students, correctional personnel, and teachers (Behan, 2014; Moeller et al., 2013).

Correctional personnel should undergo comprehensive training in the execution and administration of distance e-learning programs (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Lockitt, 2011). Enabling correctional professionals to effectively aid and monitor student progress, manage technical issues, and improve communication between students and teachers. Encouraging continuous professional development to stay informed about the most efficient techniques in online education and student assistance (Moeller et al., 2013; Vacca, 2004).

In order to develop a comprehensive approach to assisting incarcerated students, it is recommended to foster robust partnerships across correctional facilities, educational institutions, and community organizations (Costelloe & Warner, 2014; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Coordinating efforts to streamline the registration process, facilitate the interchange of information, and provide continuous support for incarcerated students. Evaluating the effectiveness of supervision methods on a regular basis and adjusting them based on feedback and evolving needs (Moeller et al., 2013; Phelps & Zahn, 2002).

Prisons can create a supportive and empowering environment for incarcerated students participating in remote e-learning programs by implementing certain monitoring strategies and procedures. This will facilitate their academic success and personal growth. As a result, this can help in their successful rehabilitation and integration into society, ultimately beneficial for both the incarcerated individuals and the broader community. Distance education has become an increasingly viable option for incarcerated individuals who wish to further their education. However, educational institutions face unique challenges in terms of providing support and ensuring the success of these students. Effective oversight strategies and protocols are essential to meet the unique needs of jailed students participating in distant e-learning programs.

A crucial type of supervision involves providing tailored academic support and coaching. Given the limited access to resources and technology for incarcerated students, it is crucial to have dedicated staff or volunteers who can assist them in utilizing the e-learning platform, acquiring educational materials, and completing assignments (Huzar & Kassem, 2022). This may entail delivering personalized instruction, coordinating study groups among peers, and dispensing guidance on time management and study methodologies. Another essential strategy is establishing clear communication channels between the educational institution, the student,

and the jail administration. Regular assessments, timely updates on progress, and immediate feedback might help in recognizing and addressing any difficulties or barriers that may arise during the educational process (Visser et al., 2002). Furthermore, fostering collaboration with prison staff, such as educational officers or social workers, can enhance the level of support available to jailed students.

Flexibility and adaptability are crucial supervisory strategies in the context of distance e-learning for incarcerated individuals. Student inmates may experience frequent relocations, disciplinary actions, or other disruptions in their educational path because of the unique circumstances within the prison setting. Supervisors must be prepared to tackle these challenges by presenting choices for assignment submission, granting deadline extensions, or providing alternative methods of learning (Farley et al., 2016). Effective supervisory strategies also involve providing comprehensive orientation and training for jailed students. This may entail familiarizing students with the e-learning platform, clarifying academic policies and procedures, and offering guidance on effective study strategies and time management (Fryer et al., 2022). Furthermore, providing ongoing support and resolving issues promptly can mitigate any technical or administrative difficulties that may arise during the learning journey.

In order to assist jailed students in distance-based e-learning programs, it is crucial to implement comprehensive and student-centered approaches. This may involve the integration of counseling, mental health support, and career guidance services to meet the varied requirements of this set of students (Huzar & Kassem, 2022). By establishing a comprehensive support structure, educational institutions can foster a sense of inclusion and empowerment among jailed students, thereby enhancing their chances of attaining academic success and reintegrating into society effectively. Overseeing incarcerated students participating in remote education programs requires a thorough approach that especially addresses the unique obstacles and needs of this population. Educational institutions can empower incarcerated students to excel and achieve success in their educational endeavors by implementing customized academic assistance, effective communication channels, adaptable strategies, thorough orientation programs, and complete learner-centered approaches. The level of supervision and support given to imprisoned students can greatly influence their participation in distance learning programs. Frequent monitoring, constructive criticism, and assistance from supervisors can effectively maintain student interest and commitment to their academic pursuits (Moeller & Preschern, 2014). Insufficient or irregular monitoring can lead to a feeling of isolation and alienation, hindering the learning process (Decker et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Coombes et al. (2020) found that students participating in a distance education program while in prison, and who had regular one-on-one sessions with a dedicated mentor, showed higher levels of engagement and a higher rate of successfully completing their courses compared to those who did not receive this kind of support. The educational performance of jailed pupils might also be influenced by the level of supervision. Steiner and Wooldredge (2015) found that providing convicts with personalized coaching, tailored instruction, and timely feedback typically leads to enhanced academic performance and skill development. In addition, effective oversight can have a significant impact on identifying and addressing educational challenges or shortcomings, thereby enabling students to overcome obstacles and achieve their academic goals (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012).

A study conducted by Jaffé et al. (2019) found that students participating in a distance education program within a prison environment experienced significant improvement in their academic performance and overall learning outcomes when they received regular feedback and support from instructors, compared to those who did not receive such assistance. The efficacy of remote e-learning programs for jailed students is closely tied to the level and quality of supervision provided. Comprehensive supervision that includes guidance on academic matters, support with administrative tasks, and access to resources can result in increased rates of student retention, enhanced completion of coursework, and improved prospects of securing employment and reintegrating into society after release (Wilson et al., 2018).

A study conducted by Lockwood et al. (2012) found that prisoners who participated in a distance education program with dedicated staff support and guidance were more likely to complete their studies, find employment, and reduce their chances of reoffending after their release, compared to those who did not receive such supervision. The extent of supervision provided to incarcerated students can significantly impact their degree of engagement, academic accomplishments, and overall success in distance learning programs while in prison. Consistent monitoring, customized guidance, and timely evaluation in efficient supervision can improve academic performance, skill advancement, and positive post-release results for incarcerated students.

Purpose

This study seeks to investigate the monitoring strategies and protocols employed to support incarcerated student offenders participating in remote e-learning programs. The project aims to assess the effectiveness of these supervisory strategies to identify barriers and potential

opportunities for enhancing the educational experiences of incarcerated students. The research seeks to enhance comprehension regarding the influence of supervision on the degree of engagement, academic accomplishments, and overall advancement of incarcerated students in remote e-learning. The primary goal is to utilize this knowledge to improve educational policies and procedures within the penal system.

Research Question

How does the supervision provided to student prisoners impact their engagement, learning outcomes, and overall success in distance e-learning programs during incarceration?

Method

Data collection

The data was collected using audio-recorded interviews, which were subsequently transcribed by a proficient English expert. Data was gathered from a group of 12 prisoners who were intentionally chosen because of their active involvement in educational programs while serving time in a prison in Namibia. To be eligible for participation individuals had to be enrolled in a qualifying program while incarcerated and demonstrate a willingness to contribute to the study. Prior to their incarceration, the participants had a wide range of employment histories, including professions such as Soldier, Body Officer, Police Officer, Civil Servant, Warrant Officer, Farmer, Teacher, Driver, Mechanic, Estate Developer, and some who were unemployed at the time of sentencing.

Data analysis

An English language expert transcribed the tape-recorded interviews. Afterwards, the author thoroughly analyzed the transcriptions using an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding the subjective meaning and experiences of the participants. Through the utilization of this approach, the author successfully uncovered hidden patterns and gained a profound comprehension of the prisoners' perspectives on their educational pursuits throughout their incarceration. The interpretive analysis aimed to reveal the convicts' perspectives on the supervision they got, the challenges they faced, and the impact of their educational activities on their personal development and rehabilitation.

Findings

Participant 1 said, “While I'm in detention, I saw it as a chance for me to improve myself and move on in life”.

Participant 2 said, “I am allowed to come the lab and access my devices like the laptop and my printer and access resources”.

Participant 3 said, “My studies are distance mode, so usually go online and then we print all relevant information and then print all relevant information and also use our study guides to assist us”.

Participant 4 said, “I used my own strategies of self-encouragement and asking other colleagues to guide me”

Participant 5 said, “I believe that as a distance student first of all you must be motivated because you are alone,”.

Participant 6 said, “We are not pushed”.

Participant 7 said, “Distance mode studying is also a very convenient way of obtaining an education in our case, there are those who don't have time to attend full time”.

Participant 8 said, “I would say that people must study on distance, because it is the best way, you can study from home while you are working”.

Participant 9 said, “By being self-disciplined, setting out the dates and times, setting out the timetable for when I should do my assignments, when I should do my tests, and being able to, just having a programme for myself, for my studies and when I will be able to do my assignments”.

Participant 10 said, “I manage like there is no time even here in the correctional facility to study, there is no lights even at night because the officers are switching off the lights but here at Window correctional facility is more better to study”.

Participant 11 said, “self-motivation, planning and telling yourself that you are doing these studies for a certain goal”.

Participant 12 said, “My advice is that this is the chance God gave us to study”.

Discussion

Distance education has emerged as a promising approach for providing educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals, enabling them to improve themselves and make progress in their lives (Participant 1). Distance learning modes enable incarcerated individuals to engage in academic pursuits and utilize educational resources, such as computers and

printers, without the constraints of conventional face-to-face instruction (Participant 2). Participant 3 described the remote education method as mostly involving online coursework, which enables inmates to access relevant information and study resources to support their learning. Prisoners who are unable to take part in full-time, on-campus programs owing to security concerns or logistical challenges can particularly benefit from this strategy (Participant 7). The study participants highlighted many strategies and encounters that improve the effectiveness of remote education for jailed inmates. Participant 4 emphasized the importance of self-motivation and seeking guidance from friends, while Participant 9 expanded on the value of self-discipline, developing schedules, and establishing a structured study routine. Developing self-directed learning skills is crucial in the context of remote education, since learners are expected to take on greater responsibility for their own progress (Visser et al., 1999).

Participants also emphasized the benefits of remote learning, such as its convenience and flexibility. Participant 8 emphasized that studying in their living quarters is the most effective way for inmates to obtain an education. However, several challenges were identified, such as limited access to communication channels (Participant 11- self-motivation, planning and telling yourself that you are doing these studies for a certain goal) and the lack of electricity at night, which can hinder academic pursuits (Participant 10). Despite these challenges, the participants' experiences suggest that distance education can offer a transforming opportunity for incarcerated individuals. Participant 5 emphasized that online learning promotes worldwide connectivity and allows jailed individuals to access educational resources, even when they are unable to physically attend classes. Furthermore, Participant 6 highlighted that offenders are not obligated to engage in remote education, expressing a preference for an educational style that focuses on the learner and encourages active involvement and internal motivation. This study's findings emphasize the importance of employing a flexible and adaptable approach to educational services within the field of leadership in educational settings, particularly for marginalized or underrepresented populations, such as incarcerated individuals (Visser et al., 1999). Educational leaders should explore innovative remote education approaches that address the unique needs and circumstances of this group, while also providing the necessary support and resources to ensure their success.

Furthermore, utilizing development research, as described in the literature (Visser et al., 1999), might be a valuable approach for educational leaders to methodically design and enhance distance education programs for jailed individuals. This methodology allows for a systematic

evaluation of the precision, practicality, and effectiveness of educational interventions, such as the Motivational Messages Support System (MMSS) employed in the study. Additionally, it can offer significant perspectives for improving online education programs for jailed students. In summary, this study highlights the ability of remote education to provide meaningful educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. By encouraging self-directed learning, incorporating technology, and addressing the unique challenges faced by incarcerated individuals, educational leaders can greatly empower inmates to improve their skills and make a positive impact on society upon their release.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The experiences of the participants underscore several implications for policy and practice, namely in the realm of remote learning and education within prisons or similar confined settings. These observations can contribute to enhancements in educational policies and procedures to assist learners more effectively in these environments.

Policy implications: There is a necessity for policies that provide fair and impartial access to educational resources, including computers, printers, and study materials, specifically for those incarcerated in prisons. It is imperative to create educational programs that facilitate self-directed learning, especially in situations when there is a lack of conventional classroom instruction. As part of the curriculum, institutions should offer instruction in self-discipline, time management, and independent study abilities. Providing workshops or materials that instruct individuals in these abilities can enable learners to assume control of their education, even under difficult circumstances. Policies should enable the establishment of effective communication channels between students and teachers, particularly in situations where face-to-face interaction is difficult. Distance education programs should be tailored to provide flexibility to fit the specific circumstances of learners, especially those who are juggling schooling with other life obligations or limitations. Institutions have to provide adaptable scheduling, enabling learners to engage in studying and accomplishing assignments at their preferred speed. This adaptability is particularly crucial in settings such as prisons, where the availability of resources may be sporadic. Enhancements to infrastructure are vital for establishing favorable learning environments in prisons and comparable institutions. Prisons should guarantee that study surroundings are adequately illuminated, tranquil, and devoid of unwanted disruptions. Resolving problems such as uneven illumination or limited study time

can greatly improve the educational experience for incarcerated individuals. Prison security rules should strike a balance between guaranteeing safety and allowing inmates to pursue educational opportunities without unnecessary obstacles. It is important to customize educational programs to meet the specific needs of learners in limited circumstances, acknowledging that universal approaches may not be successful.

Implications for practice: Prisons should be furnished with specialized educational areas, such as computer laboratories, where incarcerated individuals can conveniently access digital educational materials and print essential information. Ensuring the regular availability of these tools, with minimal limitations, can facilitate inmates in effectively pursuing their studies. Educational institutions should guarantee that instructors are attentive to students' requirements and easily reachable through various communication platforms, such as email, phone, and e-learning portals. Furthermore, the establishment of peer support networks within these settings can facilitate learners in motivating and aiding one another, as indicated by participants who depended on their colleagues for guidance. Prisons want to guarantee that study areas are adequately illuminated, tranquil, and devoid of unnecessary disruptions. Resolving problems such as irregular illumination or limited study periods can greatly improve the educational experience for incarcerated individuals. It is imperative for educational institutions and policymakers to collaborate in order to diminish the negative perception around remote education and advocate for its advantages. Utilizing awareness campaigns and showcasing success stories from distant learners can enhance the reputation and efficacy of this educational paradigm. Educators and administrators should evaluate the distinct requirements of their learners and modify instructional approaches, resources, and support systems accordingly. Individualized learning plans and adaptability in curriculum can assist in accommodating the distinct obstacles encountered by every learner. Prisons should focus on securely incorporating e-learning platforms, enabling convicts to use these resources without jeopardizing security. This may involve enabling secure and supervised internet access specifically for educational purposes and ensuring that e-learning tools are integrated into the regular educational curriculum. To establish more inclusive and supportive educational settings that facilitate the pursuit and achievement of academic goals for all learners, policymakers and educators should address these issues.

Conclusion

The participants engaged in a comprehensive discourse on many strategies and personal anecdotes related to studying under challenging circumstances, with a particular focus on distance education. Many individuals viewed the difficulties they faced, such as incarceration, as opportunities for personal growth and achievement. The participants shown exceptional perseverance, viewing their confinement as both a tough experience and a chance to expand their knowledge and cultivate personal development. They employed self-discipline, precise time management, and self-motivation to maintain their focus on their studies, despite the limitations imposed by their environment. Many participants highlighted the flexibility of remote education, particularly benefiting those with restricted mobility or commitments that made it impractical to attend traditional in-person classes. The ability to gain knowledge at one's desired pace and in various environments, such as prisons, was considered a significant advantage. Participants recognized their capacity to acquire substantial resources, such as computers and printers, and efficiently employ online educational materials, leading to notable enhancements in their academic progress. Their flexibility allowed them to efficiently balance their academic endeavors with other obligations, such as work or physical constraints, in a coordinated fashion.

The participants' experiences revolved on the core issue of communication. A significant number of participants held the belief that consistent interaction with instructors and administrators was of utmost importance, notwithstanding occasional challenges. Although they often faced delays and obstacles in receiving timely responses, they heavily relied on e-learning platforms, emails, and telephone communication to seek assistance and help. The importance of having access to these communication channels was underscored, as it enabled individuals to clarify uncertainties, obtain input, and stay connected with their educational institutions. In general, the feedback from the participants indicates that remote learning is a viable and often preferred option, especially when traditional educational techniques are not accessible. It allows individuals to enhance their education, gain new skills, and engage in personal growth, regardless of their circumstances. The flexibility of remote learning enables individuals to overcome hurdles and achieve their educational goals, regardless of difficult circumstances.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges and appreciates the support received from the National Research Council of Namibia, the Correctional Authorities of Namibia, and the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Committee. The research was authorized by both the author's institution [Ethical Clearance Certificate Ref: 2022/11/09/90284259/04/AM] and the Namibian authorities.

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