

Correctional Programmes within the Prison Community: The Views and Perception of Inmates and Staff in Anambra State Prisons, Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the views and perception of prison inmates and staff towards correctional programmes in Anambra State, prisons. The study was anchored on symbolic interactionism theory and employed the cross-sectional survey design; using the proportionate stratified sampling technique in the selection of 396 respondents that cut across various levels of prison inmates and prison officials in four prison locations in Anambra State. The structured questionnaire and In-depth Interview (IDI) Guide served as the instruments for data collection. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to code and analyze the quantitative data. Frequency tables and charts were employed to present and describe the data while the qualitative data were analyzed using the theme-based method of content analysis. The study concluded by recommending the need for periodic training of prison staffs on the current reformation and rehabilitation practices across the world so as to be able to make significant inputs that would help to change or motivate prison inmates' behaviours for change.

Keywords: Correction, Perception, Programmes, Views, Anambra State prisons

1.1 Introduction and Statement of the Problem

It is expected that when a law offender is incarcerated, he or she would be reformed or re-socialized to behave in a socially approved manner that could enable him or her reintegrate back to the society. It is also expected that the prison system would be effective in correcting the anti-social behaviours which are responsible for the imprisonment of certain individuals. However, this expectation may be probable in the Nigerian prison context. The Nigerian prison system has often been accused of breeding and enhancing criminal behaviour and recidivists than encouraging deterrence, repentance, reformation and reconciliatory attitudes between ex-convicts and people in free society, despite several policies, reforms and acts that have been promulgated over the past decades to position the prison system into a functional corrective agency (Adetula, Adetula & Fatusin, 2010).

This is in line with the view of Ugwuoke (2010) who observed that punishment continues to be an integral aspect of the Nigerian prison system over and above the rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration of prison inmates. Udutchay (2010) also noted that most of the incidents of jailbreak that have been recorded in the in Nigeria prisons are indicative of the fact that the Nigeria prison system may be faced with challenges affecting its rehabilitative, reformatory and reintegration functions.

As a result of these conditions, most prison inmates show lack of interest in the rehabilitation programmes because they feel that the programmes have little or no impact in correcting their antisocial behaviours (Esiri, 2016). One may then wonder why the programmes may not have produced expected positive outcome; leading to negative perception of the programmes among inmates. In other words, there may be certain factors which constrain the rehabilitative, reformatory and reintegration functions of prisons. According to some scholars, these factors may include: inadequate workshops and non-existent in some prisons, non-existent educational and vocational training programmes or where they exist in some prisons, necessary materials are limited or unavailable (Obioha, 2011), poor or inadequate fund provision for prisons (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011), poor and insufficient equipments for the programmes, poor attitude of prison officials and non incorporation of the inmates in reformation, rehabilitation and integration plans (Makaros, Steiner & Travis, 2010) etc.

1.2 Nature of Correctional Programmes available for Nigerian Prisons.

There exist a number of correctional programmes that Nigerian prison employs to reform its wards. Section 58 of

the Standard Minimum Rule argues that imprisonment can perform its purpose of protecting society against crime and thus be justified only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure as far as possible, that upon an offender's return to society, he/she is not only willing but also ready to live a law-abiding and self-supporting life (UN Standard Minimum Rules-section 58 and 59). The most important of these programmes are vocational and academic education, social welfare services and religious programmes, recreational activities and the re-establishment or maintenance of healthy communication between the prisoner and his family and friends (Osayi, 2015). According to Orakwe (2011), the following are important corollaries of a prison rehabilitation process:

Communication: Communicating with the outside world is considered to be very essential for a prison inmate. It is part of the social welfare programmes instituted to help prison inmates write and receive letters to and from friends and family members including visits. Such correspondence is however scrutinized by the prison authorities. This is in line with section 37 of UN Standard Minimum Rule which allows the prison inmate under necessary supervision to communicate with their families and reputable friends at regular intervals, both by correspondence and by receiving visits. By supervision, the authorities demand to know what is written in the letters they write and receive. Sometimes, some letters are withheld or part of it blotted out with ink pen for security reasons. Obioha (2011) noted that the prison needs to know what is written in their letters and where it is found to give information about the prison; the prison authorities reserve the right to protect prison security by seizing the letters or ink over the sections that are unacceptable. Beyond merely preparing the ground for their successful reintegration into the society upon release, the right of the prison inmate to receive letters and visitors is of a vital importance to him and his survival.

Recreation: A period of imprisonment is usually an arid phase in the life of the offender, marked by the decline of skills and talents and an all embracing, relentless and unrelieved boredom. A central challenge in every prison system is how to resist and put at bay this physical, psychological and spiritual degeneration of the prison inmate. The modern prison meets these challenges by a combined programme of recreation and education (Orakwe, 2011).

Unfortunately, the Nigerian prison recognizes, in theory, the need to allow the prison inmate time for recreation. Things are totally different in practice however. According to the reports of the Civil Liberties Organization, the means or facilities to exercise body and mind for mental and physical health is completely out of the question as only a handful of prisons have games and sporting facilities. Most have neither football pitches nor basketball courts, neither race tracks nor gymnasium (Osaze, 1996; Ugwuoke, 2015). The only games they have according to the report are either ludo or some card games which the prison inmates manage to get past the warders. As a result of the deficiency in this vital rehabilitation programme, Osayi (2015) observed that because the prison inmates have little or nothing to occupy themselves with at these periods, they are not always easy to manage; they constituted a potential threat to prison security. They are always moving around and it is not possible to see all of them at the same time. They can easily plan something and can easily begin to riot. But if they are engaged in playing football or other group games, their minds will be occupied and one can easily keep one's eyes on them and the few who are not doing anything. This is why in most prisons, they are not released because of lack of recreation facilities to keep them busy and for fear that they can plan and attack the warders and try to escape (Osaze, 1996).

Education and Vocational Training: If games and sport facilities are inadequate, educational materials are in worse states. Out of the one hundred and twenty nine prisons and two hundred and thirty two lock-ups in Nigeria, only sixty seven prisons have something that look like libraries (Nigeria Prison Service Annual Report, 2009). The report had it that, most of these libraries are really no more than reading rooms with a few volumes, mainly of Bible and the Koran on empty and dusty shelves.

Essentially, Nigerian prison service runs educational and vocational training programmes with the purpose of equipping the prison inmates with skills with which to make honest living after their terms of imprisonment. In addition to preparing them for such preparatory examinations as those for the general certificate of education, the programme is suppose to train prisoners in various trades, like tailoring, wood-work, weaving, soap-making, art, house painting, electrical works, farm work, etc. A former minister of internal affairs explained the logic behind this programme when he said that:

Educational/vocational training is an essential instrument for social and attitudinal change in the prison inmates while it provides skills for inmates to be more useful to themselves on discharge; it also provides them the opportunity to develop good work ethics thereby discovering their self respect and dignity (Ike, 1997: 32).

There is however a gulf between policy and practice, for most of the prisons in Nigeria has no tools, machines and other training and work facilities. It is either that the machines and tools have broken down, are worn-out or obsolete. The convicts probably do get some training somehow, but without these equipments. This is grossly inadequate as is suggested by the high rate of recidivism in Nigerian prisons.

The educational programme designed to help the prison inmate acquire some basic knowledge, as beautiful as it seems ends up in theory. As confirmed by many prison inmates who have spent some years in prison, they do not get anything like lectures to prepare them for any exam. There are no teachers and the prison authority is not even ready to pay for the teachers. A warder in Enugu prison said that it is not easy to allow prisoners to attend school from the prison. According to him, if they do not come back, it will become a very serious security problem. The prison usually provides them with only a few materials but cannot prepare them for exams. He noted that those who prepare for exams usually do so at their own expenses. They buy their books and study by themselves.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the prison has laudable correctional programmes for the prison inmates but lack of fund and obvious neglect by the government make the whole programme useless and malfunction. It is with this view that Amnesty International (2008) noted that:

The living conditions in the prisons are appalling. They are damaging to the physical and mental well-being of inmates and in many cases constitute clear threats to health. Conditions such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of food and medicines and denial of contact with families and friends fall short of UN standards for the treatment of prisoners (p.1)

One then wonders if the prison system in Nigeria is actually meant for reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration or for punishment because in worse scenarios, most prison inmates are likely to be discharged worse than the way they were before conviction, hence, the observed increase in crimes rate.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the symbolic interactionism theory. The symbolic interactionism theory is one of the micro theoretical perspectives in sociology. It was developed in United State based on the works of George H. Mead (1863-1931), and Charles Horton Cooley (1864- 1929), based on social action paradigm as envisaged by Max Weber. Weber argued that sociology is the study of society and behaviour; hence its inquiries must therefore look at the heart of interaction because humans vary their actions according to social contexts and how it will affect other people; when a potential reaction is not desirable, the action is modified accordingly (Weber, 1991).

This theory is based on the premise of how individuals construct their social world in the course of their interactions to which they share meanings and symbols, which gives meaning to the events around them (Lindsey & Beach, 2002). Symbolic interactionism assumes that all larger structures of the society are nothing more than the actions of interacting people and that they can be changed. Hence, people do not respond directly to the world around them, rather to the meaning they collectively apply to them (Blummer, 1969 in Lindsey and Beach, 2002). In other words, the meanings to which individuals attach to social events determine the actions and importance to which they attach to such events.

Accordingly, Lindsey and Beach (2002) observed that individuals do not respond to their environment rather they respond to the meanings to which they ascribe to social events through their collective sharing of meanings through symbols. Through human interactions within their milieus, they determine what is important and what is not important for them. For instance, if prison inmates perceive the prison institution as a place for punishment and not reformation, construct it within their minds; the prison institution will bear such meaning until the inmates, through their interactions change that meaning attached to it. Hence, reality is socially constructed i.e., subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not just what is objectively true (Crossman, 2009).

Since this study is focused on the views and perception of inmates and staff towards correctional programmes, this theoretical perspective helps to underscore why there may be varying perceptions between prison inmates and prison officials towards the programmes. In other words, how they perceive rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration programmes may be based upon the meanings or views they share with each other in the course of their daily interactions within their collective groupings as prisoners and as prison officials who live in a specific environment. Prison inmates have peculiar meanings to which they attach to situations around them based on their experiences within the prison setting and this may inform the direction of their perception towards reformation and rehabilitation programmes offered to them by the prison officials (whether negative or positive). Likewise, the prison officials have peculiar meanings they attach to events occurring within the prison setting and this may inform their perceptions towards the programmes offered to the prisoners.

1.4 Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. It was conducted in four prisons, Awka, Onitsha, Nnewi and Aguata prisons in Anambra State, Nigeria. From the official record, there were one thousand, nine hundred and seventy seven (1977) inmates and staff in the four prisons. The above figure constitutes the population of this study. Of this number, one hundred and eleven (111) were convicts, one thousand, four hundred and seventeen (1417) were awaiting trial inmates while four hundred and forty three were prison staff in Awka, Onitsha, Nnewi and Aguata prisons in Anambra State, Nigeria.

From the above total population, a sample of 396 was drawn using Alien Taro Yamane (1967) method of sampling size determination; Yamane (1967) provided a simplified formula to calculate sample size. This formula was used to calculate the sample size for this study as shown below. A 95% confidence level and level of maximum variability ($P = 0.05$) are assumed. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = the Sample size

N = the population size

e = the level of precision (allowable error) that is 5% or 0.05

Therefore the sample estimation is given as:

$$n = \frac{1977}{1+1977(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1977}{5}$$

$$n = 396$$

Accordingly, based on the nature of the subject matter, the proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used for this study. This is to ensure that all the elements in the population are represented according to their proportional sizes to the entire population of study.

1.5 Data Presentation

396 copies of questionnaires were administered to the respondents, out of which only 378 copies, representing 95.5% of the questionnaires were properly filled and collected back by the researcher. Therefore, 378 copies of the retrieved questionnaires were used for the analysis.

Table 1: Perceived functionality of Correctional Programmes

Variables	Prison Inmates		Prison Officials		Total	
	Freq/%	rank	Freq/%	rank	Freq/%	Rank
Carpentry	31 (10.6%)	5 th	16 (18.6%)	1 st	47 (12.4%)	4 th
Farming	10 (3.4%)	8 th	6 (7.0%)	6 th	16 (4.2%)	8 th
Shoe Making	35 (12.0%)	3 rd	14 (16.3%)	2 nd	49 (13.0%)	3 rd
Schooling	81 (27.7%)	1 st	13 (15.1%)	3 rd	94 (24.9%)	1 st
Laundry	34 (11.6%)	4 th	5 (5.8%)	7 th	39 (10.3%)	5 th
Welding	22 (7.5%)	7 th	11 (12.8%)	5 th	33 (8.7%)	6 th
Tailoring	45 (15.4%)	2 nd	13 (15.1%)	3 rd	58 (15.3%)	2 nd
Technician	28 (9.6%)	6 th	4 (4.7%)	8 th	32 (8.5%)	7 th
Counselling	6 (2.1%)	9 th	4 (4.7%)	8 th	10 (2.6%)	9 th
Total	292 (100.0%)		86 (100.0%)		378 (100.0%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The respondents were asked to rank the items given in table 6 with respect to how functional they perceived the correctional programmes in their respective prisons. As observed in table 1, the first five programmes that were ranked as most functional by the respondents include: schooling (24.9%), tailoring (15.3%), shoe making (13.0%), carpentry (10.6%) and laundry (10.3%). However, the rankings relative to prison inmates and prison officials indicate that from the perception of the prison inmates, schooling, tailoring and shoe making are the first three major effectively functioning programmes in their respective prisons while the prison officials perceived carpentry, shoe making and tailoring as the first three most functioning programmes in their prisons. The respondents were further obliged to express their perception with respect to the nature of equipments used in the programmes. Their views are presented in figure 1.

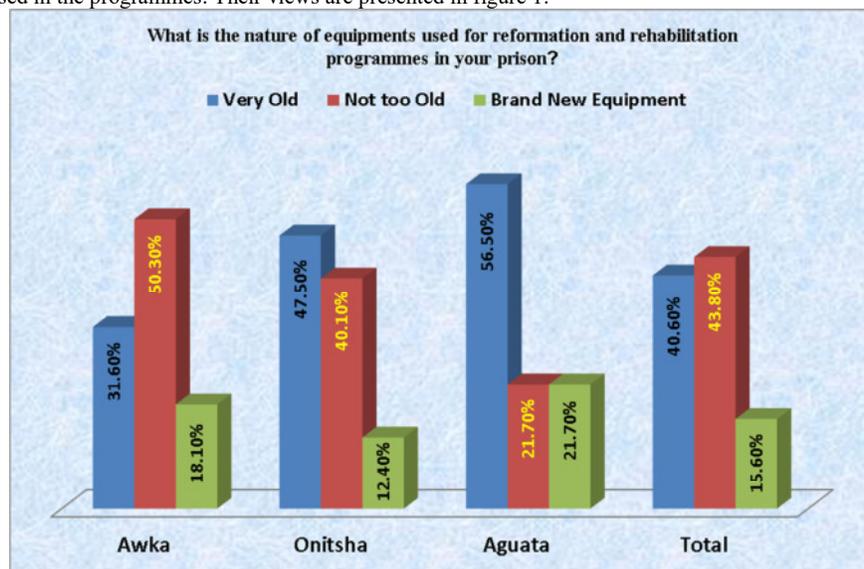


Fig. 1: Respondents' perceived nature of equipments used for correctional programmes in the Prisons.

Figure 1 shows that a relatively half proportion of the respondents (43.8%) agreed that the equipment used in the prisons for correction of prisoners are ‘Not too old’. This is at variance with the view of about quarter of them (40.6%) who affirmed that the equipments are ‘Very Old’. Only a very low proportion of them (15.6%) were of the view that the equipments are ‘Brand new’. The perception varied according to prison locations; while a majority of the respondents in Awka prison (50.3%) were more affirmative that the equipments are ‘Not too old’, those in Onitsha and Aguata prisons (47.5% and 56.5%) respectively were affirmative that the equipments are ‘Very Old’. Only about a quarter of those in Onitsha prison (40.1%) had the view that the equipments are ‘Not too old. There were a shared percentage of those who affirmed that the equipments are ‘Not too old’ and those who affirmed that the equipments are ‘Brand new’ in the Aguata prison (21.7% and 21.7%) respectively. This finding based on majority vote pattern, therefore implies that the equipments used in the rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration programmes in the studied prisons are relatively old, hence their functionality is limited. The respondents were also asked to express whether or not the equipments used in the programmes were functional to their tastes. The findings are presented in table 7.

Table 2: Functional Satisfaction of the Respondents with the Equipments used for Correctional Programmes.

Options	Prison Status		Total
	Prison Inmate	Prison Official	
Yes	82 (28.1%)	57 (66.3%)	139 (36.8%)
No	210 (71.9%)	29 (33.7%)	239 (63.2%)
Total	292 (100.0%)	86 (100.0%)	378 (100.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

As contained in table 2, a majority of the respondents 228(63.2%) said that the equipments used for the correctional programmes were not functional to their taste while only about a quarter proportion of them 139(36.8%) were of the opinion that the equipments were functional to their tastes. This finding was not the same among the prison inmates and prison officials. A greater percentage of the prison inmates 210(58.6%) were of the opinion that the equipments were not functional up to their tastes while a greater proportion of the prison officials 57(66.3%) agreed that the equipments were functional to their tastes. This goes to imply that the perception about the functionality of the equipments used for the programmes is relative to the position the individuals occupy in the prison community. This finding is complemented by the qualitative findings:

I am not satisfied with the equipments we use in the programmes. Most of the equipments are outdated and some of them are not even functional. The functional ones are either not properly maintained or not regularly operated. Most of the equipments are abandoned due to lack of maintenance. So I think that a lot need to be done in terms of the equipments so as to help each learn better while we are still here (IDL, 34 year old Male Prison Inmate, Aguata Prison).

Another respondent had a contrary opinion:

If you go around and check, you will find that the prisoners are making use of most of the equipments to learn. Despite the shortcomings we experience in the course of our duty, we try to overcome them by making sure that the little resources we have are put to optimal use. So I can assure you that we maintain the equipments used for the vocational skills training and most of them are still functional up to date to my satisfaction (IDL, Senior Prison Official, Onitsha Prison).

To further examine how functional efficient the programmes instructors were, the respondents were asked to rate their perceptions about the functional efficiency of programmes instructors. The findings are shown in figure 2.

As contained in figure 2, a slightly greater proportion of the respondents (34.9%) agreed that the programmes instructors were very efficient in their functions. This view is at variance with a closer proportion of the respondents (30.4%) who affirmed that the programmes instructors were not efficient at all; while 26.5% of them agreed that the programmes instructors are fairly efficient in their functions. This goes to show that there is no unanimous perception among the member of the prison community with regards to the functional efficiency of the programmes instructors. In a more specific way, the data in figure 2 further shows that a greater proportion of the respondents within the prison inmates category (38.0%) were in agreement that the programmes instructors were not efficient at all in their functions. This is at variance with those in the prison officials’ category, which a majority of them (65.1%) strongly agreed that the programmes instructors were very effective in their functions. This finding therefore implies that the perception towards the functional efficiency of rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration programmes instructors is relative to the two major groups in the prison community (that is, prison inmates and prison officials).

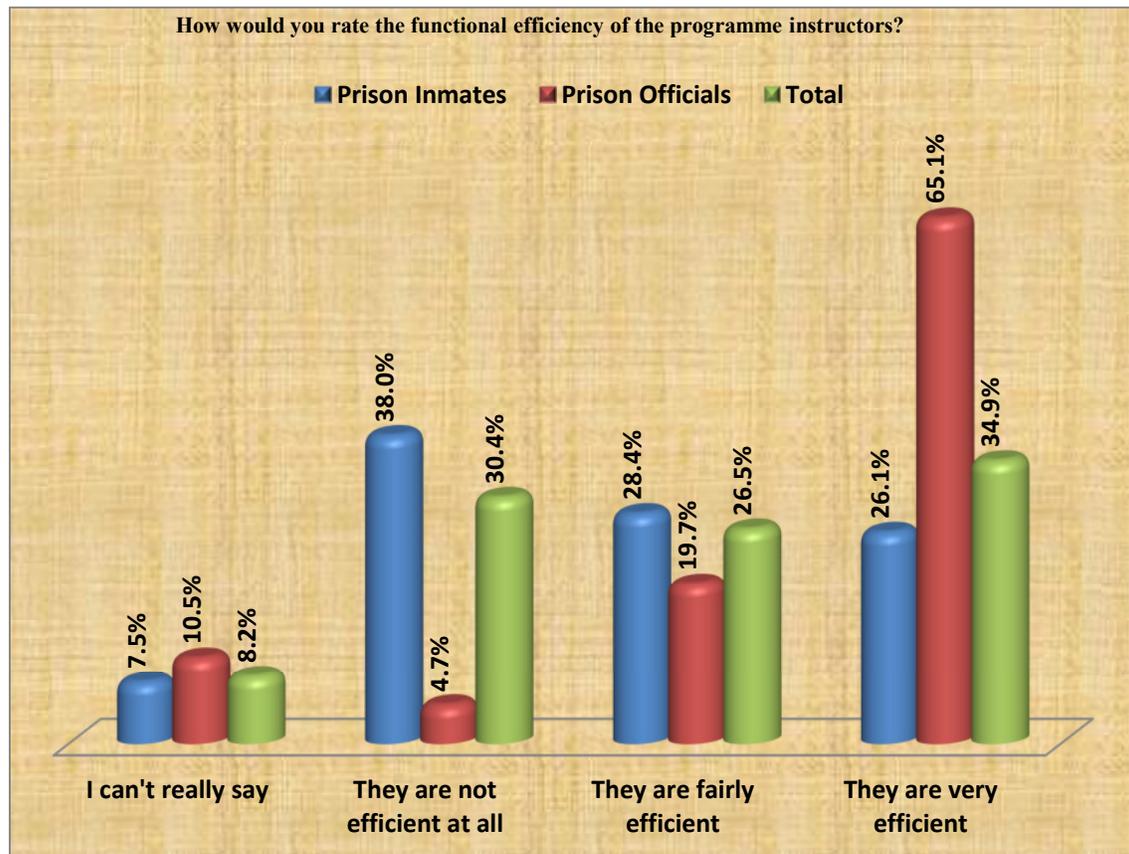


Fig. 2: Distribution of Respondents on their perceived functional efficiency of correctional programmes instructors.

1.6 Conclusion

The numerous challenges facing the correction of prison inmates in Nigeria and the seeming inability of both the prison authority and the government to adequately address these problems formed the basis of motivation for this study. Hence, this study examined the views and perception of inmates and staff in Anambra State Prisons, Nigeria. The essence was to ascertain the manner in which the prison inmates and prison officials perceive the correctional programmes in the prisons in Anambra state. Following the result of data analysis in this study, the researcher therefore recommends the serious need for the replacement of the old facilities used for reformation and rehabilitation programmes with modern equipments that will meet international standard and prison inmates' needs. There is also a need for periodic training of prison staffs on the current reformation and rehabilitation practices across the world so as to be able to make significant inputs that would help to change or motivate prison inmates' behaviours for change.

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