

Humanizing the Nigerian Prison Through Literacy Education: Echoes from Afar

USIWOMA EVAWOMA ENUKU

Abstract

Prison population has been on the increase in recent years reaching well over 70,000 in 1997, seventy percent of whom are functionally illiterate. Because of limited resource allocation for educational programs there has been little systematic educational provision for prison inmates in Nigeria since the inception of the prison service. A close study of colonial and post colonial laws seem to emphasise the custodial functions of the prison while silent on correctional functions of the modern prison. In view of the increasing emphasis on correctional education in most countries in Europe and North America, this paper focuses on the need to humanize the Nigerian prison system through educational provisions. This will no doubt help ex-offenders develop positive social skills. Due to the marginal nature of educational programs coupled with inhuman conditions in Nigerian prisons, there is an urgent need for a humanizing approach to penal administration via education and other socio-cultural activities. Such an approach is encouraged by the positive echoes from Europe and North America.

Background

During 1997, the total prison inmate population in Nigeria was well over 70,000, seventy percent of whom are functionally illiterate. The educational deficits of the prison population appeared to be even greater than those of the general population. These prisoners, however, because of their confinement, did not have access to the non-formal and formal educational programs in the outside community. Because of limited resources allocated for educational programs there has been little systematic educational provision for prison inmates in Nigeria since the inception of the prison service.

The first prison in Nigeria was established in 1872 located on Broad Street Lagos. Prisons began all over the world not as ultimate institutions for punishment and correction but initially meant for the custody of persons caught up in the criminal justice systems awaiting trials or the execution of their punishment such as whipping, banishment and death (Rothman cited in Alemika, 1987). However, in the mid-nineteenth century, the function of the prison as short-term custodial facility changed in Europe and North America to institutions for ensuring punishment, penitence and correction of the offender. By the time the first prison was built in Nigeria in 1872, the prison had assumed its new role.

The establishment and growth of the prison is backed by various statutes from the colonial period to the present. Among these are the Prisons Ordinance of 1916; Laws of Nigeria (1948 and 1958) and the Prison Decree No. 9 of 1972. A Government White Paper in 1971 outlined the functions of the prison service to include: custody, diagnosis, correction, training and rehabilitation of incarcerated offenders. The Nigerian Prison Service Staff Duties Manual listed an additional function, generation of funds for the government through prison farm and industries. Similarly, the colonial ordinance of 1916 and the Laws of Nigeria 1948 and 1958 identified the function of the prison to include the safe custody of a prisoner. A close study of colonial and post

colonial laws seem to emphasize the custodial functions of the prison while silent on correctional functions of the modern prison.

In view of the increasing emphasis on correctional education in most countries, this paper focuses on the need to humanize the Nigerian prison system through educational provisions. This, it is believed, will help the ex-offender to develop social skills and a better understanding of their lives and the society.

The thesis of this paper is that, in view of the marginal nature of educational programs, and the inhuman conditions in Nigerian prisons, there is an urgent need for a humanizing approach to penal administration via education and other socio-cultural approaches. Such an approach is encouraged by United Nations Declaration of the right to education, work, health-services and culture, and five resolutions adopted at the United Nations in 1990.

The Nigerian Prison and Education

At this point, there is a consensus of opinion that although the 1971 Government White Paper contains correctional functions, in practice there is no evidence of a properly funded education system in Nigerian prisons. The emphasis on custodial functions coupled with rising prison population have led to overcrowding in the prisons. Most of the prisons currently contain twice the number of inmates they were intended to house, especially Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs).

Between June and July 1998, following the sudden death of General Sanni Abacha, Nigeria's Military Ruler for five years (1993-1998), the prisons attracted considerable media and public attention when political and other detainees were released from the prisons. The experience of those released from various prisons spoke of grim conditions and the absence of a humane policy for the treatment and education of prison inmates. A few examples bear repeating in this paper. In a recent survey of the prisons, the Vanguard concluded that the Nigerian prisons today hold twice their capacity and

Prison capacity

Prison	ATPs*	Convicts	Total Inmates	Prison Capacity	Difference
Kano	592	225	817	690	127
Goron-Dutse	311	164	475	600	135
Kirikiri medium	1768	521	2289	704	1585
Kirikiri maximum	1139	736	1875	1056	819
Ikoyi	1517	144	1661	800	861
Port-Harcourt	965	379	1344	804	540
Kuje	100	44	144	80	64

Source: Vanguard, Friday June 26, 1998. p. 27 *Awaiting Trial Persons

paucity of funds has made the upkeep of the inmates provision of facilities a near impossible feat while facilities for rehabilitation of prisoners, which is a major reason for imprisonment, are virtually lacking or grossly inadequate (Vanguard, 1998). The figures in the table above confirm the overcrowding in the prisons.

The overcrowding coupled with inhuman conditions in the prisons have led to the prisons being variously described as “human cages” (Kayode, 1987) and human zoos (Newswatch, 1985; Tell, 1998) with little or no provision for organized educational programs. Available evidence revealed that there is no known official policy on education throughout the prisons in Nigeria. Enuke’s (1987, 1991) earlier conclusion that educational provision varies from prison to prison is supported by recent reports by Mbah and Ajibade from Biu and Makurdi prisons respectively (Tell, 1998). Mbah, a journalist who was convicted of involvement in a military coup and served three years in Biu prison before he was released in July 1998, observed that:

Throughout the three years, had no access to books. When I arrived there in 1995, they said I could only read the bible... They would bring books from the library, they would not give me. They would give all their prisoners... They said I had not come here to read.

On the other hand, Kunle Ajibade, another journalist convicted for the same “offense” like Mbah but was in Makurdi prison, reported that he read extensively while in prison. “After screaming and a lot of hassles some of my books were sent to me.” From his three years’ experience at Makurdi prison, Ajibade concluded that, “In prison, I learnt that people could be so cruel. There is no reformation going on in our prison.” Confirming the grim conditions in Nigerian prisons another journalist, Charles-Obi (Tell, 1998) who was also convicted of involvement in the same military coup because they reported the story, observed that:

It was a four-by-four room, completely dark and without ventilation. We were not allowed to see sunlight. We were in solitary confinement for about two months.

Thus there is a wide gap between the ideal and real situation, despite government declaration in the 1971

White Paper. Two reasons may have accounted for the conditions in prison. In colonial times, the interest of colonial masters was sustained through repressive penal codes and penalties administered by an authoritarian judicial and law enforcement system. Twenty-eight years of authoritarian military rule out of the thirty-eight years of independence has helped to accentuate the status quo. In July 1998 there were more than four hundred political prisoners in Nigerian prisons. The military, like the colonial government, does not tolerate opposition, real or imaginary.

In a situation where government locks up people for years without trial for political reasons it is clear that the purpose of the prison is primarily punishment and not corrections. This may help to explain the absence of properly funded and organized educational programs. Thus the contemporary criminal justice system in Nigeria is insensitive to recent humane principles for the treatment of offenders and their education.

Presently, education is a marginal activity in Nigerian prisons. At the best it takes the form of unorganized apprenticeship for a small number of prison inmates which is a means of maintaining the prison system (Enuke, 1987). It has no provision for in-prison budgets. Education in its present form may not be able to serve as an antidote to the most harmful effects of the prison environment (Parkinson, 1983, p. 67). Anomie, alienation, apathy, contamination are all negative concepts which aptly summarize the prison environment and there would seem to be very little education could contribute to reduce these influences while it received no financial resources from the government. A budgetary allocation for education would have to be accompanied by a major attitudinal change by the prison authority if education was to contribute positively to the role assigned to it by Decree 9 of 1972. There would need to be a greater degree of collaboration between prison authority higher education institutions, and educational agencies outside the prison so that a prisoner’s educational interests initiated in prison might be followed into the immediate post release period. The continuity of educational experience would also need to be taken into account during transfer of prison inmates from one prison to the other. At this point, the rights of all men and women recognized by the

United Nations enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to education are not taken into consideration in the Nigerian prison system. The sensitization and training of prison teachers in the country must be a long-term aim of educators both within the prison system and in Nigerian society.

An alternative educational approach that involves a much more humane intervention to prison life is being suggested. Although this approach has been largely ignored in the Country, it has been attempted with some positive impact elsewhere. This piece will now focus on such attempts, which despite the debate on the effect of education on ex-offenders' life style perhaps offer a way forward over an otherwise fairly bleak horizon (Parkinson, 1993).

While the educational approach has not been tried in Nigerian prisons (Enuku, 1998) it has been tried with considerable success in Europe and North America (Parkinson, 1983; Duguid, 1981, 1989). The approach is based on the theories of Dewey and Piaget, through Kohlberg's linking of the stages involved in levels of moral reasoning ability. It is referred to as cognitive because it recognizes that moral education, like intellectual education, has its basis in simulating the active thinking of the child about moral issues and decisions (Kohlberg, 1980). It is also called development because it sees the aims of moral education as movements through moral stages. The approach emphasizes Socratic peer dismissal of value dilemmas. The discussion aims at stimulation of movements to the next stages of moral reasoning. It rejects indoctrination. Thus in relating this approach to correctional education, it is expected that correctional education should include moral, academic and vocational education. The recommended curriculum includes math, science and philosophy for the development of logical thought and reasoning, and the liberal arts, including English literature and history, for the development of moral reasoning (Parkinson, 1983; Duguid, 1981). For the prisons to provide moral education, there is need to humanize the prison environment to create just communities. Perhaps it is just communities that Pawson and Tilley (1992) had in mind when they speak of "coincidence of favorable circumstances" as one of the factors that may influence the success or otherwise of correctional education.

What is stressed in this approach is that most criminal offenders are particularly lower in moral judgement development than non-offenders of the same social background (Kohlberg cited in Duguid, 1981). While socio-economic factors could be largely responsible for crime, retarded cognitive-moral development may help to explain the individual choice to act on those factors in a criminal manner (Duguid, 1981). Based on this delayed cognitive development a majority of prison inmates are egocentric, which is an indication of pre-adolescent stages of cognitive / moral development (Samenow, 1991; Fabiano, 1991). Samenow found this to be the most striking thing in prisoners' views of the world, that people are simply pawns on a chessboard, to be moved about at will.

To remedy this deficit in moral and cognitive development growth, the educational growth model recommends the teaching of thinking skills. In a review of dozens of correctional education programs with published evaluations, Ross and Fabiano concluded that the Kohlberg method is the most effective way of producing an increase in the skills of social perception and the development of morals (cited in Garrido and Sanchis, 1991). Various other scholars also identify errors in thinking as the cause of criminal behavior and recommend cognitive development which will address the thinking patterns of offenders (Merren, 1991; Roby and Dwyer, 1991; Rabak and Walker, 1991). There is some consensus among these scholars that although offenders need academic and vocational skills, socialization requires the development of values. Merren (1991) concluded that:

When it comes to literacy and job skills, clearly differed offenders have different needs. In thinking and social skills, however, they approach a universal deficit.

These lines of thought have been enshrined in five United Nations Resolutions. The resolutions reflect the idea that the criminal justice culture is an educative one as recognized by Roby Kidd in 1981 (ICAE, 1990). Thus criminal justice falls within the mainstream of adult education interests and priorities. To meet these interests and priorities, prison inmates should be treated as human beings with basic needs.

One way of achieving this is that prison inmates and outside agencies must be actively involved in program design, implementation and evaluation which is not the practice in Nigerian prisons. In the prison in Nigeria, inmates are not in any way involved in design, implementation and evaluation. The programs are designed centrally by the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs which control the prisons. The programs are then sent to the various prisons for implementation. The value of involving prison inmates in the design of programs is recognized by Grant (cited in Semmens, 1989) when he concluded that learning is facilitated in prisons by maximizing learners' participation in developing their own learning programs and in providing knowledge to themselves and others. In the same vein Germscheid (1989) concluded that offender change will be most apt to occur in programs in which the offender is given an active role in the instructional process. In line with adult education principles and practice, Warner (1989) stressed the importance of learners' participation and the drawing of learners' experience into study and activities. A basic assumption here is that adults should be consulted because they come with a package of experience that may be useful to the learning situation. Adults are consulted about what is to be taught through discussion and dialogue as conceptualized by Freire (Collins, 1988; Rogers, 1985). Through dialogue, the adult educator will get to know background needs and aspirations which will form the basis of their educational needs. This will no doubt help to create a just and humane community in the prison environment.

Another aspect of this humane approach is to include the outside society to which the inmate will return in the education and management of the prisons (Suvaal, 1989; Langas, 1989). In the realization of this, program structures in Europe and North America dealing with correctional education have been redesigned in recent years to reflect both rehabilitation and practical vocational training. In order to achieve this, whenever possible prison inmates are allowed to take part in education outside the prison. For instance, in Denmark prisoners go to work outside the prison on a daily basis as part of practical vocational training (Prisons in Denmark, 1990). Similarly in Norway there is educational provision for prison inmates nearing release. The peak of the program is a stay for a week outside the prison. This week is used for all sorts of sporting activities and in addition they may also be a hike in the mountains for two to three days (Langas, 1989). Where education has to take place within the prison, the outside community is involved as fully as possible. In Norway, volunteer and community involvement is an essential element of a modern prison system because only by involving the community can prison treatment prepare inmates for their return to the community and the community can accept that prisoners are its responsibility (Langas, 1989). However in the Nigeria situation, whatever relationship the outside community has with the prison is adhoc and uncoordinated. There are two prominent groups that visit the prison, namely, religious groups that come in to preach with the primary aim of winning converts to their faith and NGOs like the Rotary Club, Lions Club, Inner Wheel Club among others. The primary aim of NGOs is to carry out community service. They offer help in the area of providing chairs, tables, and resources for education. There is no formal working relationship between the two groups and the prison system and they are in no way involved in the design of prison programs. Prisoners are not allowed to take part in educational programs outside the prison nor is the outside community involved in prison education on a systematic and regular basis. For this relationship to be meaningful there should be a well coordinated program in which the outside community is involved in the planning, the implementation and evaluation. Otherwise there is bound to be duplication and dissipation of energy and resources since the groups involved do not know what the other is doing.

Furthermore, there are aftercare services to bridge the gap for prisoners on release between the systematic orders of prison and the uncertainties of life outside (UN and WE, 1995). This generally involves collaboration between probation staff, social workers and NGOs. In a number of counties, NGOs exist to provide aid and education to ex-offenders. The importance of aftercare is becoming more widely recognized in most counties in Europe and North America. In the state of California in the United States, each vocational student in prison is assigned a "job-developer" who becomes the case manager of the inmate (UN and UIE, 1995). After release, the job-developer may continue to visit the ex-offender and to attend job interviews with her or him. In Britain,

the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) exists to provide post-release education and aid. A major part of NACRO's work is to ensure the continuation of education and training begun in prison through its local network of contact points for ex-offenders. In the United States, Safer Foundation with headquarters at Chicago, established since 1972, is one of the active NGOs offering post-release education and job placement. Presently more than 50 percent of its staff are ex-offenders who have benefitted from educational programs organized by Safer Foundation.

This writer is not aware of any NGO in Nigeria that provides aftercare service to ex-offenders at this point in time. The situation is further worsened by the inability of the social welfare arm of the prison to carry out after-care service due to lack of funds since the middle 80s (Enuku, 1991).

Moreover, in order to normalize prison conditions and encourage the acquisition of socially accepted attitudes and values, family visits are allowed on a regular basis in countries in Europe and North America. The educational benefits of such visits cannot be overemphasized. In Europe in spite of improvements in the visiting situation, by far the greatest cause for concern among prison inmates is lack of family contact. To facilitate family visits, prisoners are placed in the prison that is closest to her/his home in Denmark and to strengthen the ties to the outside world, the inmates are entitled to receive visits in the prison at least one hour every week (Prison in Denmark, 1990). In most prisons there are special visiting rooms where prison inmates may be along with visitors. In fact visits are only supervised in very rare cases. This means that it is possible to have sexual intercourse with visitors (conjugal visits) in all prisons. Where there are no visiting rooms visitors can spend time in the inmate's room undisturbed. In closed prison, visits may be allowed every day which last a couple of hours, while in open prison, visitors are allowed on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays and normally for longer than two hours. The objectives of the visits are twofold; to maintain family ties and secondly as a means of providing opportunities to practice parenting and other social skills taught in correctional education programs in prison.

The situation in the Nigerian prison policy is different in every respect. Firstly, the government for political vendetta deliberately transfer some prisoners farthest from their home. Ajibade and Mbah already mentioned are typical examples. Makurdi and Biu prisons where they were kept are at least 800 kilometers away from Lagos where they both have their families. Choice of prison in these instances is meant to isolate them completely from their families, their friends and familiar environment. Ajibade's experience tells the whole story.

My happiest day in prison was when they brought my second son to me. My wife was carrying his pregnancy when I was arrested. He was born January 16, 1996 and he was brought to Makurdi prison in April 1996 (Tell, 1988, p. 6).

Charles-Obi although he was in Ibadan prison which is about 100 kilometers about an hour's journey by car

from Lagos, was not allowed frequent family visits. In his own words:

Initially members of my family were not allowed to see me... but later, the rule was relaxed. I had access to two people, each of them once in a month. Even at that, I was not allowed to freely discuss with them. It was more of a 10 - 15 minutes affair (Tell, 1998, p. 10).

The two people who were allowed to see him were the mother and his elder sister. Although he was planning to get married, his fiancée was not one of the two visitors to see him. If prison inmates are to maintain their family ties while in prison, it is only fair that regular and unsupervised visits should be encouraged including conjugal visits. Conjugal visits will no doubt help reduce in situ homosexuality in Nigerian prison especially with the AIDS virus spreading very fast in most African countries.

Conclusion

The current prison policy and practice in Nigeria gives a very pessimistic outlook regarding the adoption of humane prison administration policies in practice in other parts of the world especially in Europe and North America. In order to humanize the Nigerian prison environment there is an urgent need to adopt recent UN Minimum Standard for the Treatment of Offenders as approved in 1990. The recommendation is humane, concrete and feasible in terms of objectives and goals. The UN Recommendation is based on research-proved cause and effect relationships. It addresses all the issues raised in this paper, education, community involvement in prison management, family visits, and so on. The adoption will no doubt bring the practice of prison administration and education in line with current practice in Europe and North America.

References

- Alemika, E.E. (1987) "Organisational management and leadership behaviour in environmental turbulence." A paper presented at a seminar organized by the Prison Staff College, Kaduna.
- Collins, N. (1988) "Prison education: A substantial metaphor for adult education practice" *Adult Education Quarterly* 38 (2,) Winter, 101-110.
- Duguid, S. (1981) "Becoming interested in other things" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 43, (1,) March 38-45.
- Duguid, C. (1989) "Education for what? Curriculum, pedagogy and programme objectives" paper presented at the Second International Conference on Prison Education Oxford, September.
- Evawoma-Enuku, U. (1987) "A novel idea in prison education" *Convergence* xx (2.)
- Evawoma-Enuku, U., (1991) "Gender and prison education in Nigeria: The relevance of international literacy year 1990" in Duguid S. (ed) *Yearbook of Correctional Education*, Burnaby, Canada: Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University 79-89.
- Evawoma-Enuku, U., (1998) "An analysis of the factors affecting the implementation of correctional education programmes in prisons in Edo/Delta States" Unpublished Doctorate Thesis University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
- Fabiano, A.E. (1991) "How education can be correctional and how corrections can be education" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 42 (2,) June 100-106.
- Garrido, V. and Sanchis, J.E. (1991) "The cognitive model in the treatment of Spanish offenders. Theory and practice" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 111-118.
- International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) (1990) *Education and Criminal Justice Newsletter* No. 7 March.
- Kayode cited in Alemika, E.E. (1987) op cit
- Kohlberg, L. (1980) "The cognitive development approach to moral education" *Phy Delta Kappan* June.
- Langás, A. (1989) "The sharing of the responsibility between authorities, educational institutions and voluntary organizations in the rehabilitation of prisons: The import model" paper presented at the second International Conference on Prison Education, Wadham College Oxford, U.K. September 25-28.
- Merren, J. (1991) "Crime, social education, and the twenty-first century" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 42 (2,) June 51-55.
- Newswatch (1985) Lagos, Nigeria.
- Parkinson, E. (1983) "Educating adults in prison" *Studies in the Education of Adults* 15 September 67-73.
- Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1992) "Re-evaluation: Rethinking research on corrections and crime" Duguid, S. (ed) *Yearbook of Correctional Education 1992* Burnaby, Canada, Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, Canada 19-89.
- Prisons in Denmark (1990) Ministry of Justice, Dept. of Prison and Probation, Copenhagen.
- Rabak, T. and Walker, J. (1991) "Envisioning and creating change project social responsibility" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 42 (2,) 94-99.
- Roby, P.C. and Dwyer, H. (1991) "Through the looking glass, darkly: Teaching for thinking" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 42 (2,) June 74-79.
- Roger, A. (1985) *Teaching Adults: Milton Keynes*, Organ University Press.
- Ross and Fabiano (cited in Fabiano, A. E. (1991) "How education can be correctional and how correction can be education" *The Journal of Correctional Education* 42 (2,) June 100-106.
- Tell (1998) Lagos, Nigeria, 32 August 10.
- United Nations and United Nations Institute for Education (1995) *Basic Education in Prison*, Hamburg, Germany.
- Vanguard (1998) Lagos, Nigeria. Friday June 26, 27.
- Warner, K. (1988) "Adult education and the institutions. *The Adult Learner* 1 (4,) 4-11.

Biographical Sketch

Dr. Usiwoma Enuku is a Senior Lecturer and currently Head of Department of Adult Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, from September 1, 1997 to June 30, 1999. E-Mail: usienuku@uniben.edu.ng