

An Education as a Rehabilitation Tool for Incarcerated People

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Abstract

Following the new paradigm of working with people during incarceration, rehabilitation programs have replaced the retributive or deterrence perspective, which is the old way to punish criminals. The method of punishment in the form of rehabilitation focuses on changing the offender's behavior to become a good person and the conscience not to repeat the same offense and be able to return to society and live according to social norms. In addition to restricting certain rights and freedoms (such as being detained in prison), this is an essential punishment for criminal acts. Those entering the punishment and rehabilitation process must have adequate training to return to their everyday lives, such as education, vocational training, and psychological treatment, to avoid feeling low self-worth from being judged and punished. The correctional system in Thailand not only uses education programs to improve inmates' literacy but also provides programs to support the idea of rehabilitation punishment. The research presented that prisoners who attended the educational programs (formal education, non-formal education, and informal education) and vocational education will improve their life skills and self-esteem and be ready for release without turning back to criminal pathways. However, the responses of prisoners about the educational programs in prisons in Thailand are limited to programs and teachers, including the differences in gender characteristics, which the Thai correctional systems and related government sectors should be concerned about in the future.

Keywords: Rehabilitation, In-Prison Education, Prisoner

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Introduction

According to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) Rule 4, a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures derivative of a person's liberty primarily protects society against crime and reduces recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.

The Thai Department of Corrections, in its commitment to meeting international standards, has established a comprehensive evaluation process. It considers the necessities of prison life for inmates, such as bedding, cooking, cafeteria, medical facilities, and waste disposal, as government performance indicators at the department level. These factors are also used to evaluate the performance of the prison. The department has also developed a form of action against prisoners that aims to change behavior or rehab consistent with the nature of the offense while upholding the principles of human rights and the human dignity of prisoners.

The Division of Social Work, a unit within the Department of Corrections, provides rehabilitation programs for prisoners that adhere to social welfare standards developed by international social welfare institutes. These programs are tailored to each prisoner's profile, taking into account factors such as the type of offense, physical and mental health, substance abuse, and period of imprisonment. Additionally, prison programs cover vocational training, education, drug prevention and treatment, recreation, mental development, and life improvement. Pre-release programs focus on individual interviews, group counseling, and guidance for living after release.

Thailand's commitment to education for prisoners is evident in the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the format and nature of the curriculum. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice selects groups of inmates to study according to their needs and abilities through the Department of Corrections. This is despite clearly defined criteria for receiving education. However, the report admits that empirically measuring the provision of education for prisoners is difficult. This study, therefore, questions the appropriateness of the methods of organizing education and the content of education in prisons for prisoners, whether they are effective or not, both in terms of quality, conformity to the concept of rehabilitation, and the needs of prisoners.

Literature Review

Punishment

Understanding punishment is not just an academic exercise, but a crucial aspect of our societal fabric. It serves as a shield, protecting us all from the actions of offenders. This shield takes the form of 'general prevention,' a measure that deters others from committing similar crimes, and 'special safeguards,' which aim to prevent offenders from re-offending or causing future harm to society. These measures, often accompanied by rehabilitation and prevention strategies, fulfill the primary mission of protecting and preventing society from criminal offenses (Mcpherson, 1967).

Although punishment is an essential feature of every legal system, there is widespread disagreement about moral principles that conflict with the principle of punishment. One

fundamental question is why the institution of social punishment is accepted and perpetuated in society. The second concerns whether the necessary conditions for a particular sanction must be applied and whether considering the cause of the offense is essential. Finally, the third question concerns the appropriate level of severity, especially the offense and the perpetrator. The debate about punishment is essential and closely related to rights issues and appropriate standards for evaluating punishment to become a social practice (Binder & Notterman, 2017; Hudson, 2003; Zedner, 2004). Punishment is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It plays a pivotal role in maintaining social order, but its effectiveness varies depending on the circumstances. For instance, while revenge punishment may provide emotional closure to the victim, it does not address the future benefits of preventing repeat offenses. Similarly, intimidating punishment may deter the offender during their stay in a detention facility, but it does not guarantee their reintegration into society. On the other hand, rehabilitation-focused punishment has been proven to reduce repeat offenses and uphold the dignity of the offender, but it may raise concerns about the safety of the victims. These complexities highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of punishment, a need that your expertise and research can help fulfill (Martinson, 1974).

Modern punishment systems have evolved to incorporate a mix of theories and approaches. The aim is to strike a balance between protecting society and rehabilitating offenders. This integrated approach to punishment, which includes processes that can intimidate and deter potential wrongdoers, is a significant direction in contemporary punishment practices. It involves a combination of retributive, deterrent, and rehabilitative elements, aiming to address the needs of both the offender and society. This approach is a strategy all countries adopt to prevent crimes and reintegrate potential human resources into society (Phoglad, 2023).

Rehabilitation as Punishment

The concept of punishment for treatment and rehabilitation is rooted in the Rehabilitative Theory, developed during scientific awareness. Using a scientific method, positivism, and a study using empirical evidence to prove the research study's beliefs and assumptions will lead to the development of an effective punishment process for offenders. Its effectiveness is appropriate for the individual and prevents recidivism. Criminologists who believed in using science to improve punishment include Lombrozo, Garofalo, and Ferri, who focused on studying individuals to uncover the root causes of crimes and use the results to improve punishment methods for offenders. They found that a person's wrongdoing does not only arise from internal factors within the person, such as psychological or biological factors, but also includes environmental factors, such as the living conditions and upbringing of the family. Social pressure, economic conditions, lack of education, etc., are all factors that differ between individual offenders. Therefore, punishment should not only focus on making up for the wrongdoing or setting an example so that others will not follow suit, but the cause of the offense should be considered, and the appropriate punishment should be to correct the causes.

Punishment in the form of rehabilitation focuses on changing the offender's behavior to become a good person, having the conscience not to repeat the same offense, and being able to return to society and live according to social norms (Binder and Notterman, 2017). This is in addition to restricting certain rights and freedoms (such as being detained in prison), a bare punishment for criminal acts. Those entering the punishment and rehabilitation processes must have adequate training to return to their everyday lives, such as education, vocational

training, and psychological treatment, to avoid feeling low self-worth from being judged and punished (McNeill, 2014).

It can be seen that punishment for offenders, according to this theory, focuses on the perpetrator rather than creating fear in society. Those who commit crimes are treated like patients. The expression of criminal behavior is caused by illness or some factor that stimulates the symptom (criminal behavior). Therefore, those responsible for punishing offenders must classify the offender's characteristics, find the actual cause of that wrongdoing, and find appropriate solutions. Therefore, this concept is "giving" offenders a chance to reform or correct and improve themselves so as not to repeat the offense. However, each person's penalty process will differ (Robinson and Crow, 2009).

In some cases, when analyzing the circumstances of an offense, it may be necessary for the offender to enter the detention system in a specific location, e.g., prisons or detention centers, along with treatment to correct offender behavior according to specific patterns studied as well as moral and religious training. In some cases, the offender may not necessarily be detained in prison but may receive a suspended sentence of imprisonment and probation. Along with doing activities that are beneficial to the public, which will help refine the behavior and mind of the offender not to go back and commit the same mistake again, even if the person has no fear of punishment. According to the concept of punishment according to the theory of punishment for rehabilitation, essential objectives can be summarized as follows (McNeill, 2014; Binder and Notterman, 2017):

- (1) It is a punishment aimed at education and understanding the causes of a person's wrongdoing behavior, emphasizing education. The analysis focuses mainly on the perpetrator and environmental factors.
- (2) It is a punishment that requires a solution to the offender rather than punishment.
- (3) It is a punishment that allows the offender to return to living an everyday life happily with others in society. Able to comply with social and legal norms with minimal stigma or self-devaluation.

Another important thing is the guidelines that should be followed when using the principles of punishment to rehabilitate offenders, which can be summarized in five points (Ashworth, 2007):

- (1) Avoid exposing the offender to things that destroy his character.
- (2) If the offender receives a short-term imprisonment, alternative methods should be considered.
- (3) The punishment must be appropriate to the circumstances of the individual offense.
- (4) When the offender has changed his behavior to meet society's standards or can change their behavior for the better. The punishment should be stopped, and the remaining punishment should be suspended. Because even if there is further punishment, it will be useless.
- (5) There should be improvement and development of various potentials during confinement. Because of the theory of punishment for rehabilitation.

Various research studies support that rehabilitation programs for incarcerated prisoners are effective ways to reduce prison overcrowding and recidivism rates (Denman, 2015; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). For instance, the findings of Denman (2015) illustrated that appropriate programs significantly reduced re-offending rates.

Education as a Rehabilitation Tool

Prisoners' rights are enshrined in many international documents. These include the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, which states that "every prisoner has the right to participate in cultural and educational activities aimed at the full development of the human personality" (United Nations, 1990). Although education and rehabilitation may be considered different ways of working for an individual, many educators and criminologists have commented that when considering the important principles of education and rehabilitation, it can be said that both principles aim to create a process of self-analysis, building humanity, and accepting the rationality of things. Therefore, considering the above principles, education can create rehabilitation for individuals, especially cognitive skills (Freire, 2017; Hooks, 1994; Lindeman, 1944; Maruna, 2012; Mezirow, 1994; Rotman, 1986; Whitaker Report, 1985).

However, prison education is not necessarily a panacea for the damaging effects of prison (Muñoz, 2009), but adult education approaches can help alleviate it. Prison education must be experiential and participatory and not "suffer from narrative illness" (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 13; Freire, 2017, p. 45). Educating offenders incarcerated in prison will help bring about profound changes at the life attitude level, including creating changes in considering one's potential, others, and social situations. This idea is supported by Costelloe & Warner (2014), who argue that prison education based on the educational philosophy will promote inmates' critical thinking and creativity, which can create a holistic self-development process. However, the challenge of organizing education in prisons is to create an education management process that must consider that a prisoner is a person who has the status of a learner, not a prisoner.

Education in prison is not a means to an end in detention in order to provide a path to a faster release of prisoners but is a process of building an essential future for prisoners (Costelloe, 2014). Providing education in prison is an essential mechanism for rehabilitation, empowering prisoners by creating awareness of the power of personal transformation, building a potential they can create through the educational learning process, and learning how to use that potential correctly. Therefore, prison education is not just a time-killing process that prisons provide to inmates. In addition, Costelloe & Warner (2014, p. 238) also reflected in their research that apart from education being a process of rehabilitation of prisoners to be able to engage in occupations and can be a gateway to social and economic mobility, it can also create awareness and create attitudes of being a "normal person" for prisoners instead of valuing themselves as just "those who have been imprisoned."

Aims of the Study

- To explore the in-prison educational system in Thailand
- To find the gaps in providing education in prisons in Thailand
- To delve into the educational needs of prisoners, particularly female prisoners, paving the way for future guidelines on education patterns for female prisoners in Thailand

Participants

Study Setting. Thailand has different correctional institutions based on gender, sentence type, and length. In keeping with the purpose of the research, ten researcher-selected female prisons and women's correctional institutions in Thailand were used for the study: (1) Chiang Mai Women Correctional Institution; (2) Phitsanulok Women Correctional Institution; (3)

Nakhon Si Thammarat Prison; (4) Songkhla Women Correctional Institution; (5) Rayong Prison; (6) Ratchaburi Prison; (7) Nakhon Phanom Prison; (8) Nakhon Ratchasima Women Correctional Institution; (9) Women Correctional Institution for Drug Addicts; and (10) Central Women Correctional Institution. The researcher selected representative prisons and women's institutions based on the most significant number of women within each region according to the setting of the Thai Correctional system. Although this research is qualitative, which is part of a quantitative study, the purpose of gathering data from selected women's prisons from across the whole country was to explore the self-identified needs of Thai women in prison to avoid the bias that could be introduced by surveying only prisoners from one or a few areas, and to allow for identification of particular sets of needs associated with particular geographic regions.

Population and Sampling Procedures. The study's sample selection was designed to be inclusive, ensuring a diverse range of Thai women had the opportunity to participate. Twenty female inmates, two from each prison, were included. The selection criteria mirrored the quantitative part of the study, encompassing Thai incarcerated women sentenced for drug offenses and nearing release (12-18 months left).

Respecting the autonomy of the respondents was a vital principle of this study. All participants were required to be able to read and write in Thai, and they were given the freedom to express their opinions, pause or skip questions, and even leave the research process if they felt uncomfortable at any point.

Research Methodologies

This report highlights the qualitative part of our research on pre-release programs for female prisoners, which was led by the quantitative study. A significant aspect of this section was the use of content analysis, a systematic approach, to synthesize the opinions of a sample group on pre-release rehabilitation programs for Thai female inmates. This allowed us to identify the main and sub-issues, analyze an appropriate educational management model for female prisoners in prison, and develop guidelines for future educational management. We also incorporated white documents, such as government reports, research papers, and laws, to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Research Instruments

The questions were developed from concepts related to preparation before release, including questions related to women's self-identified pre-release rehabilitation program needs, especially appropriate education for prisoners. Per other research questions, the main focus of the investigation was to explore the self-identified rehabilitation program needs of women in prison and to examine relationships among the independent variables of women's demographic backgrounds (i.e., age, education level, religion, marriage status, number of dependents, hometown, employment status before incarceration, and primary source of income before incarceration), criminogenic factors prior to incarceration (i.e., substance abuse profile and relationship history, including individual strain profiles and interpersonal relationship profiles).

Findings

In-Prison Educational Programs in Thailand

The current educational management guidelines allow lifelong learning opportunities consistent with social dynamics. The Corrections Act 2017, Part 2 Classification and Behavioral Development, Section 42 stipulates that for the benefit of correcting, treating, rehabilitating, and developing the behavior of prisoners to turn them into good people, a system of behavior development must be established. Appropriate methods and guidelines for developing prisoner behavior allow prisoners to receive education and link it to Section 5 of the Corrections Act 2017, namely rights, duties, benefits, and other activities related to prisoners. As well as Part 1, Section 44, Rights of Prisoners, prisons are legally obligated to provide primary education for prisoners by the National Education Act and must be governed by the Ministry of Education's education curriculum, including training. This underscores the accountability and responsibility of the staff and officials in ensuring the provision of education. Morality and ethics and training for employment opportunities provide all prisoners with equal access to education and training. Programs and courses for behavior development have been implemented by driving the practice.

Population Demographic

All women in this qualitative study were Buddhists. The average age of respondents was approximately 34 years old. More than half were married, and only five respondents reported being separate. Regarding their educational levels, 16 of 20 respondents were high school graduates and over, both general education and vocational education, and four had completed 6th grade or less. Concerning their pre-arrest employment status, 15 of 20 participants reported being employed in permanent careers (housekeeper, merchant, and farmer), and five were employed in non-permanent careers, i.e., part-time jobs and short contract work. Their monthly average income was around 5,000-6,000 Thai baht (or around 140-170 U.S. dollars). Regarding the substance abuse and mental health issues of women prisoners before incarceration, the respondents revealed that all of them had used substances, particularly methamphetamine, crystal methamphetamine, alcohol, and cigarettes. The main factors that let them be involved in substance abuse were peers in communities and their boyfriends or partners.

Although the respondents addressed that they did not have serious school problems (i.e., being suspended or temporarily excluded from school or being expelled or permanently excluded) before incarceration, many had been regularly truant or skipped school. Additionally, most of them faced severe problems during childhood, such as sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Education of Female Inmates' Perspectives

Most participants in this study agreed that they would like to receive personal development programs that would vary according to their needs and backgrounds before receiving them. These programs could include life skills training, mental health support, and cultural sensitivity workshops. Release from prison includes improvements in life skills, social support, and the creation of educational and employment opportunities.

As for the education and employment programs while in prison ship detention, study participants stated that the educational programs provided should meet their needs rather than merely be a convenience to the prison. They said the most important educational programs were primary education, enabling them to read and write, and vocational education programs for working after release. As for vocational education, female prisoners mentioned that it should be a career they can use for their careers and should have certification from the agency that provides training to them, such as massage certificates and licenses, cooking certificates, and tourism and hospitality certificates. These certificates can be used to apply for jobs in establishments or to create one's own business. Therefore, prisons should provide educational programs, emphasizing certificate programs offered alongside compulsory education (due to regulations of the Department of Corrections regarding educational services) or other vocational training. For instance, the Central Women Correctional Institution has successfully implemented a vocational training program in handicrafts and cooking, significantly reducing recidivism rates among its female inmates.

Additionally, to help incarcerated women interested in starting their businesses after being released from prison, education programs should emphasize education about management to support the need for self-employment, with education programs covering financial planning, branding, and marketing. Furthermore, education should be a collaborative effort between prisons, educational organizations, and communities. This could involve partnerships with local businesses for job placements, educational institutions for curriculum development, and community organizations for post-release support. For example, vocational education programs should link with employers in the community.

Challenges Factors

Although ideally, TIJ reported that (2014) all prisoners should have at least compulsory education, not all prisons comply with such regulations. One of the critical reasons is that many female prisoners were unable to attend school due to sentences that were shorter than the duration of the compulsory education program, such as a six-month prison sentence (or less). Alternatively, imprisonment, instead of a fine, usually lasts up to 6-8 months, while compulsory education at each level in prison lasts approximately one year. In addition, some women did not have educational profiles or could not access the profiles from schools prior to incarceration, so they did not have an academic certificate that would give them the ability to apply for study at the appropriate education level in prison. The final obstruction that incarcerated women may face after release, although they graduated from the in-prison educational programs (both academic and vocational education), is a limitation of cost for operation and study at the higher levels.

Discussion

For respondents' demographic background, women in the study sample were similar to Thais in general in terms of religious affiliation, with the proportion of Thais in each category being Buddhist at the most (around 95%) and five percent covered Muslim, Christian, and others (Thailand Board of Investment, 2023). A mean mid-thirties age was close to estimates from other global studies in which most inmates (Joosen et al., 2016; Fazal et al., 2017; Covington, 2007). Also, the sample's age range was similar to that of Thai women in society; the median age of Thai women is 39 years, the largest median age group of the entire population (Thailand Board of Investment, 2023). According to their education and career profiles, this would indicate, per the scholarship, that there were barriers to them finding a stable job

(O'Brien, 2002). Due to their low socio-economic status, many women engaged in drug dealing/sales as a source of support for themselves and their independent or family prior to incarceration (Bing & Albano, 2017). Like observations from other research, alcohol use disorder and drug use disorder were both highly prevalent in women imprisoned for drug-related offenses (Fazal et al., 2017; Covington, 1991).

In light of female prisoners' characteristics and circumstances, various researchers and scholars proposed that they had different pathways into crime than men. Individual life experiences and histories of women's relationships are significant factors in the forms of criminal pathways and personal deviant behavior (Artz et al., 2012; Dastile, 2011; Steyn & Booyens, 2017). The findings were similar to perspectives and the basis of the research of feminist criminologists, such as Daly, Covington, and Bloom, in the 1990s-2000s, including researchers from other disciplines (i.e., social work, psychology, politics, and law) on characteristics of women's pathways into crime. They indicated low socio-economic circumstances, notably, lacking education, experiences of abuse/violence during their childhoods, difficult family situations, mental health issues, and substance abuse or drug addiction prior to imprisonment as significant factors that placed women at an increased risk of victimization and pathways into crime (Covington & Bloom, 2006; Bloom & Covington, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2009; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Dillon et al., 2016; Morgan & Chadwick, 2009; Joosen et al., 2016).

Regarding various factors of the female criminal path, Thai prisons have applied the principles of rehabilitation of offenders to the management of prisoners in prisons. The main goals of providing education programs in prisons--formal education and vocational education--are to improve the chances of success in employment and life and to reduce re-offending after release (Rose & Rose, 2014; Pompoça et al., 2017; Ellison et al., 2017), which related to the ideas of rehabilitation. Additionally, from a self-perspective point of view, education is critical in improving prisoners' esteem because they believe they can live by themselves. A meta-analysis of 18 re-offending studies found a negative relationship between education in prison and recidivism rates, meaning that people who participated in an educational program during imprisonment would have a lower chance of recidivism (Ellison et al., 2017).

The sample group's data and the prison information presentation to the Department of Corrections found that prison education was set in general and vocational streams. However, formal education teaching and learning could be more consistent with prisoners' needs and educational backgrounds; the subjects taught, facilities and staff, and the teaching and learning evaluation methods. In addition, teaching and learning are organized in the form of vocational training; even though it is an education that aims to enable prisoners to use it to pursue a career and create income for themselves after they are released from prison, the challenges are still available. The challenges of in-prison training are related to the needs of prisoners and job markets, which cover short-term, intermittent, and topics that do not correspond to the needs and characteristics of prisoners—considering that the current job market is highly competitive because of economic and social impacts, new labor skills are required in the market, such as social and emotional skills, as well as technological skills (Pattarapatumthong, 2021). Therefore, vocational training in this area that is unable to create expertise for prisoners, even though they have completed education in the prison system, is still unable to meet the needs of the current work system truly and may lead prisoners to recidivism after release.

Much research on education for prisoners in correctional areas mentions alternative education programs different from formal education and vocational training. However, researchers are also thinking about adult education, which not only provides knowledge or skills for work but should also be a process that is relevant both inside and outside of the prisoners' lives (Costelloe, 2014; O'Donnell & Cummins, 2014).

Conclusions

For respondents' demographic background, women in the study sample were similar to Thais in general in terms of religious affiliation, with the proportion of Thais in each category being Buddhist at the most (around 95%) and five percent covered Muslim, Christian, and others (Thailand Board of Investment, 2023). A mean mid-thirties age was close to estimates from other global studies in which most inmates (Joosen et al., 2016; Fazal et al., 2017; Covington, 2007). Also, the sample's age range was similar to that of Thai women in society; the median age of Thai women is 39 years, the largest median age group of the entire population (Thailand Board of Investment, 2023). According to their education and career profiles, this would indicate, per the scholarship, that there were barriers to them finding a stable job (O'Brien, 2002). Due to their low socio-economic status, many women engaged in drug dealing/sales as a source of support for themselves and their independent or family prior to incarceration (Bing & Albano, 2017). Like observations from other research, alcohol use disorder and drug use disorder were both highly prevalent in women imprisoned for drug-related offenses (Fazal et al., 2017; Covington, 1991).

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