

# ***Exploring Non-Formal Educational Experiences from Adaptive to Transformative Responses***

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the non-formal educational experiences from those of adaptive to transformative responses. Adaptive responses focus on achievement of immediate outcomes as a makeup of what is missing. Similarly, transformative responses address the medium to long term outcomes that focuses on making a difference in individuals and societies in general. Based on interpretive paradigm using qualitative approach, desktop review and interviews were held in 2015 with five ex-offenders in the country of Lesotho. The findings revealed that non-formal education appeared to be the suitable approach used for adults in a learning environment. It has also been found that in the context of Swaziland Correctional Centres, the inmates engage in the needs assessment and evaluation of their non-formal educational programmes, which increases the formers' motivation to embrace the change within and amongst them. While the needs assessment are not conducted for the inmates in the Lesotho context, some ex-offenders demonstrated that by tailoring programmes and utilizing their own personal knowledge, they were able to share skills through tailored educational programmes in spite of the prison bureaucracy and that they have consequently established an organization that serves as a link between the prison and the societies. However, the findings further revealed that non-formal education characteristics are more realised in theory than in practice for different contexts.

Keywords: Adaptive response, Transformative responses, Non-formal education

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## **Introduction**

In the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA), non-formal education and learning initiatives have increased significantly and further strengthened formal means of learning (Rogers, 2004; UNESCO, 2014). Education is a powerful tool for all forms of social change, economic development and for the eradication of different forms of injustices and inequalities, hence it is empowering and liberating. Education in general and non-formal education in particular caters for all age learners throughout the lifelong phenomenon whereby all individuals' growth and self-improvement are encouraged (Rogers, 2004). This research was done with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding on how non-formal education address the needs and interests of the offenders. This was done by looking at how non-formal education is delivered based on its characteristics and whether its learners effectively participated in the educational programmes that were meant to change their lives. The research was undertaken in 2015 with ex-offenders in Lesotho with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of how non-formal education caters for the adaptive and transformative needs of its clientele. To address the main purpose of the research, ex-offenders were asked three questions of: what have you learnt while you were incarcerated in custody? How did the content address your needs? Were you incorporated in the programme or skills that you learned while in custody? The concept of non-formal education was discussed, followed by non-formal education provision within the correctional facilities as the main theoretical concepts that were used to interrogate the data. The methodology section will be discussed later followed by the findings and discussions before the final section on conclusion and recommendations.

## **Non-Formal Education**

Literature has significantly shown (UNESCO, 2014; UIS, 2012; Rogers, 2004) the renewal of interest in non-formal education in an effort to meet and reach the targets of Education for All goal, which is placed at the centre stage of global education and development agendas and debates. Non-formal education manifested actively in traditional societies by using apprenticeships in different works when people learned a specific trade (Peace Corps, 2004). Additionally, on-the-job training is widely conducted through non-formal means of learning. Apart from this, traditional knowledge was passed from generation to generation through one to one teaching or group facilitation using various methods of non-formal education. Thus, non-formal education as opined by Sevdalis & Skoumios, (2014, p.14) is commonly known to be:

Any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children.

In this definition, the impression is that non-formal education is flexibly organised in order to suit its participants' environment wherever they may be. In the same way, Rogers (2004) states that non-formal education is provided on a continuum, at one point it is closer to formal education and at the other end it is closer to learner ownership. The author stipulates that non-formal education is further extending opportunities for job creation and development activities for its participants (Rogers, 2004). Thus non-formal education has been regarded as remedial education for people

who have missed out their opportunity to attend formal education; hence it is regarded as complementing the latter (UNESCO, 2014).

Although non-formal education has various characteristics that emphasize the flexibility and the learner-centred regarding the control, delivery mode and the content, it is conceptually argued as a form of education where learners have a say in what they want to learn. While this research will show that in practice, the concept is experienced differently in different contexts, meaning that it reacts differently to adaptive and transformative responses of its learners.

### **Non-formal education as reacting to adaptive outcomes**

According to UNESCO (2014) non-formal education has taken shifts with multiple types that occur for particular learning requirements of its participants. UNESCO further indicates that the non-formal context specific tactics are suitable for reaching out to different populations for accomplishing the goals of EFA to learners who cannot access formal education. In this way non-formal education responds to adaptive outcomes as its provision is mainly to rectify the shortfalls felt by its clientele and assist them to adapt and adjust to their environment and conditions of life. Consequently non-formal education provides specific learning needs and interests that falls within the achievement of immediate personal outcomes (UNESCO, 2014). These include education and training, knowledge and skills acquisition, enhancing the quality of life, reducing poverty and improving the livelihood initiatives in regard to the socio-economic needs. In this manner, the initiatives focused on the making up of what is missing in terms of modifying the behaviour, adjusting to an environment and enhancing personal development to mention a few. These outcomes are mainly to assist the participants in adapting to different situations hence non-formal education is provided for adaptive responses (UNESCO, 2014). In the same manner non-formal education also reacts to transformative responses of its learners as in the following section.

### **Non-formal education as reacting to transformative outcomes**

Alternatively, non-formal education further took another shift of addressing the immediate to long- term structural outcomes that entailed different peoples' dispositions. This include but not limited to: realising the socio-cultural context and creating awareness thereof, identity recognition, empowerment, increased socio-political participation, breaking the social and economic barriers and other inequalities (UNESCO, 2014). In the same way, UNESCO (2014, p. 6) when discussing about the evolving concept of non-formal education identified "experimental and innovative non-formal education, some of which involves greater independence from governments, to respond to emerging learning needs as societies evolve." Here the cited examples are education for peace and democracy, citizenship education and education for sustainable development. Moreover, non-formal education develop the human capabilities, improve social cohesion and create responsible citizens (UNESCO, 2014), meaning that it develops an individual above mere education and learning initiatives. It can be seen that the focus is mainly to make a difference in individuals and societies in general, thus achieving transformative outcomes. The subsequent section deals with correctional education, which in most countries is provided through non-formal education means.

## **Non-formal education provision within the correctional facilities**

Recent studies by Biswalo (2011) in Swaziland, Setoi (2012) and Tsepa (2014) in Lesotho, Mkosi (2013) and Quan-Baffour & Zawada (2012) in South Africa show that there is a range of formal, non-formal and informal adult educational programmes undertaken by inmates. However the extent to which prison inmates participate in the planning and implementation of different educational programmes affecting their needs and interests, varies from country to country.

According to Biswalo (2011) in the context of Swaziland, the department of Adult Education at the University of Swaziland in consultation with the prison service, conducted needs assessment between 1997 and 2009. The conducting of needs assessment was done before developing the educational programmes to ensure that the felt needs of the inmates were included and addressed by the educational programmes offered, followed by monitoring exercises. Biswalo (2011) assert that needs-assessment was conducted with the inmates through individual interviews and group discussions. Thereafter, prioritization of needs took place based on the capability and the potential of the inmates to acquire and secure resources for conducting the programmes that can develop into viable businesses, after their release from prison. In the whole exercise, activities that required locally available and less expensive resources were given priority over others. Moreover, Biswalo states that the department of adult education provide relevant training that strengthens what the inmates have acquired within the correctional institutions as best practices. Biswalo further outlines that baseline assessment and placements are also conducted before developing the content to be taught. The inmates' contributions to their programmes enhances their ownership to the latter, which also address and meet their learning needs (Biswalo, 2011). This is different from what happens within the Lesotho's correctional facilities.

The Lesotho Correctional Service (LCS) provides a variety of programmes that are taught by LCS officers, volunteers and the inmates themselves. Normally, prison populations are less well educated than the general population in Lesotho and in other countries (Setoi, 2012, Biswalo, 2011). According to Setoi (2012), the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services in Lesotho offers education and training to the inmates as mechanisms to rehabilitate and reintegrate them with their communities. These education programmes are provided as literacy and numeracy formal classes from Standard 1 up to Form E, which is equivalent to grade 1 to 12 in South Africa, basic and continuing education classes that are meant to assist the inmates to acquire qualifications for job opportunities for male inmates in Maseru and Mphahle's Hoek Correctional Centres. The inmates are further provided with skills training such as carpentry and joinery, stone cutting, building, welding, leatherwork, electrical installation, plumbing, plastering and brick-making, upholstery and sewing. However, the methods used to deliver the above trainings are not stated, as well as whether the inmates are involved in planning for their educational programmes to address their needs. The next sections discusses methodology that was used to conduct the study.

## Methodology

This was a small scale explorative study using qualitative approach. The interpretive paradigm was employed and the primary data was collected through individual interviews using a semi-structure interview guide in Maseru, Lesotho. The interpretive paradigm entails “understanding the social phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives that actually live and make sense of it in their natural setting” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009 p.315). Purposive sampling was used to select five key informants being the male ex-offenders who have experienced to be imprisoned in custody within the Lesotho’s correctional facilities. Ex-offenders were identified through snowball sampling where one person would recommend the other ex-offender known to them, who has the same relevant information. All the ex-offenders provided their stories and their viewpoints regarding the educational programmes that they embarked on during their incarceration. Although the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population, the offender’s role within the environment under which they carry out their sentences excludes the wider society while the shared experiences may be similar for the incarcerated community. Inductive qualitative data analysis was used where themes were developed from the data, categories, insights and understandings were further formulated. Different theoretical concepts of non-formal education and were mapped across the data as theoretical lens for discussing the inductively derived themes and for more abstraction.

## Findings

Findings are presented according to the themes that emerged from the data provided in the responses from the ex-offenders. They are presented orderly as basic literacy education and life skills, transformed attitudes and identity recognition.

### *Basic literacy education and life skills*

In response to the question of what they learned during the time they were incarcerated, ex-offender E bemoaned:

It was very painful for me to be there as an inmate (Shaking his head slowly sideways with his face down). However, I feel happy because I have that experience of being an inmate and it toughened me [made him to be tough]... (Clears his throat) I learned how to write and read my name and a few sentences. I can even count the numbers, which was not the case before I was incarcerated. The prison has taught me several skills that I was not aware of, such as landscaping, gardening, feeding pigs and cleaning my surroundings (Ex-offender E).

The respondent indicated that incarceration has made him to become a tough man. He further showed that he learned how to write and read. The findings reveal that some inmates acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills, which they learnt during incarceration, thus enabled them to rectify their gap of being illiterate. Additionally the inmates were assigned work that taught them life skills of how to keep their environment clean including taking care of animals that are kept within the correctional facilities. On the same note about what the offenders were learning while in custody, ex-offender A lamented:

I approached other inmates about the idea of formal school and I was responsible to see that the school was operating. Those who were enlightened and had formal education background taught the others who were illiterate (Ex-offender A).

Ex-offender A pointed out that some offenders would volunteer to teach others who were illiterate so that they can also acquire the basic skills of how to write and read their names. It is noted that the offenders supported each other since they shared common experiences of being in the same position of incarceration. Additionally, the non-formal characteristics of flexible environment can be seen as the offenders used to learn while incarcerated in the correctional facilities. This means that learning takes place everywhere in particular using non-formal education approaches. Of great concern was their ability of making the decisions regarding whether what they learn would address their needs and interests or not.

In regard to the life skills that were offered, ex-offender E indicated that the content that was learned did not address his needs because he spent the entire sentence of five years doing gardening, which was not his interest. He emphasised that he was interested in welding and electrical work. He mentioned that he had basic knowledge about welding since he learned while as an apprenticeship with another person from his community. However, he showed that he was comfortable with gardening and landscaping because he realised that there was shortage of equipment for doing that welding work. In his words:

Welding is dangerous because it affects a persons' eyes. All those who joined that team were having problems with their eyes. It is because there was no proper equipment used to protect people while they did that work. I decided that it was better for me to do gardening and landscaping because there was no harm in performing those tasks.

It can be observed that ex-offender E was able to settle for the work of landscaping and gardening as a way of avoiding to endanger his eyes with welding work that he liked. Moreover, the warders seem to be making the decisions for the offenders in terms of what skills to learn or not. This imposition of skills refutes the non-formal educational feature whereby curriculum or content has to address the learners needs and interests, therefore has to be learner-centred. The data also show that the offenders were never consulted in terms of what they would want to learn as skills for future use. Instead what seemed to matter was whether the sentence to serve as punishment was longer or shorter before the work was signed to the offenders. This has an implication on how the offenders may be transformed with the expectation of being socially reintegrated back into their societies.

#### *Transformed attitudes*

On the other hand, ex-offender B attested that he did wood work and he continued with that work after his release from prison. He reported to be a self-employed and enjoys his work. He said:

I did wood work while I was there [under custody] and I learned to do build-in shelves, wardrobes, tables and many other things. I now support my family through the income that I generate from my workshop. I am now a new person

who has reformed from criminal acts. I have three people who help me then I pay them monthly. In fact I was never rehabilitated by those officers, I counselled myself and told myself that I needed to change completely (Ex-offender B).

On the question of whether he chose for himself to do woodwork or not, he responded by showing that the work was imposed on him. He alleged:

*(Smiling)* Fortunately I took that work seriously and ensured that I learnt everything. At first I wanted to join those who did the bricks and building. The warders refused [when I wanted to join the building team] and they instructed me to join the wood work team. We did not choose for ourselves, they [warders] placed us according to the length of our sentences. The ones who were serving long sentences were not allowed to go out, therefore remained in the workshops. Prison life is tough ... (pause), it needs a person who can accept that instructions had to be followed. But at the same time [one had to] look out for the opportunities and make use of them; that is how I survived for the 12 years that I stayed there (Ex-offender B).

Ex-offender B had a positive story to tell regarding his transformed attitude through learning by doing the wood work, which also follows the purpose for non-formal education. It can be observed that ex-offender B used the acquired skills, start-up his own workshop where he was able to generate income. It is interesting to see that the respondent counselled himself, accepted the instructions that were given by adapting to prison life situation that potentially transformed his attitude and life for the better. His knowledge has further become a resource for income generation which is economic empowerment. It is because he provided employment for other people who were able to provide support to their families as well. Of particular concern was the notion of ex-offenders identity.

### *Identity recognition*

Ex-offenders are seen to have significantly changed their behaviour in terms of how they think as individuals and how they can assist each other including the offenders who are about to complete their sentence. Learning from what they experienced while incarcerated, when they received no support from their significant ones, they supported each other as demonstrated in the following quote:

We had an informal support group of peers and we thought about starting an association for ourselves. We established this NGO to try and fill that gap for such activities ... we have tried to approach government to change the way they perceive the ex-prisoners but we have a long way to go. The issue of a link is an important thing that we do, also to link them [released-prisoners] with existing members of this NGO in different districts and their families. Other things do not need money to happen (Ex-offender D).

In the above quote, ex-offender D related a story that while incarcerated, they were able to set up a peer education programme with other offenders, where they even went further to decide about establishing an association, which would serve as a link between the offenders who were released and those under custody. Ex-offender D indicated that with the peer support, they managed to establish Crime Prevention

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners Association (CRROA) in Maseru, Lesotho. The ex-offender further stated that the association has representatives in all the districts. In other words, ex-offenders have established association that made their identities to be recognised. In this way, the link serves between the incarcerated offenders and their families through the ex-offenders. He illustrated that upon his release, he found it very hard and difficult to go to his home alone without anyone accompanying him. In his words:

My family never visited me while I was in custody for eight years. That made me feel less confident when I was about to go there [home] alone, hence I needed someone to accompany me. By the time of my release, the only people that were closer to me were other offenders and the prison warders.

Additionally he said that his release brought everything to an end between him as an ex-offender and the prison. It can be argued that the ex-offenders experience of unfavourable family members' attitudes, packed with labels associated with prison and lawbreaking identity makes it difficult for them to feel and belong as part of their communities. Therefore the establishment of their ex-offenders' association may have been propelled by the fact that ex-offenders felt more comfortable to fit with each other rather than being with the larger population. It can be noted that the link promoted a sense of self and belongingness for the ex-offenders who support one another. These findings have implications for how the policy should cater for social reintegration and use a link as another mechanism that needs to be further strengthened for enabling the reformation of ex-offenders and their avoidance of re-offending.

## **Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that illiteracy is a concern for offenders under custody, whereby some of them never went to school. It can be argued that to a large extent, their lack of education may have also influenced their engagement in committing of crimes hence the view support the literature (Biswalo, 2011; Setoi, 2012). Moreover the offenders' relationships amongst themselves seemed to have been built upon trust whereby the latter facilitated their learning from each other in a flexible relaxed environment. The flexibility of environment is one of the powerful characteristics of non-formal education that makes it easy for learning to take place everywhere hence it can be concluded that it is a suitable approach for use with adults in any learning space. Furthermore, it can be argued that non-formal education responded to the needs and interest of the offenders who rectified their shortfall of not knowing how to read and write including counting. Hence the data supports what UNESCO (2014) has shown in terms of non-formal education as facilitating for the adaptive outcomes of its clientele.

Additionally, it has been found that offenders learned various life skills such as gardening, landscaping, and wood work among others, however these were imposed on them. Here the findings revealed that the non-formal characteristics of learner-centred in regard to control and who determines what the learners want to learn is not happening as it should be. The situation with offenders under custody in Lesotho differs from the situation of the inmates incarcerated in other contexts like Swaziland, where the offenders are engaged in the needs assessment and evaluation process,



which enhances their motivation to learn and change their lives (Biswalo, 2011). Therefore, the findings demonstrate that non-formal education characteristics are often realised in theory but not in practice for other contexts.

Furthermore, the data demonstrated that some offenders managed to transform their attitude by accepting and conforming to the situation in custody. This was expressed by ex-offender B who developed a positive attitude and started his income generation workshop from the wood work skills that he acquired while incarcerated. The data confirmed that non-formal education that is provided within the correctional facilities indeed facilitates the employment opportunities and rehabilitation of offenders as stated by authors like Biswalo (2011), Quan-Baffour & Zawada (2012), Tsepa (2014) and Setoi (2012). Ex-offender B took the wood work skills seriously and coped thereby transforming his life for economic status. As a result non-formal education feature of its learners who acquire skills for immediate application (Rogers, 2004) was realised with ex-offender B, as he used the skills for positive livelihood benefits. Additionally, despite the prison bureaucracy and the toughness that the ex-offenders felt while under custody, they managed to set up an association for themselves. It was found that through modifying their educational programmes and through the peer support amongst them, they consequently established an association that identified them as ex-offenders. The association further serve as a link between the released offenders and their families and communities. Likewise, non-formal education has facilitated for their transformative outcomes where ex-offenders association is a long term response and serve as reintegration for the offenders since it promotes their sense of belonging.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is evidence that key feature of non-formal education as articulated in the literature, that of a participatory process which involves the learners in the design and content of their own curriculum is not happening within the Lesotho correctional facilities. This was illustrated by the data where several life skills were imposed on offenders during their incarceration. However the findings demonstrated that through the offenders' trust and support for each other, some volunteered to facilitate the teaching of the basic literacy skills for those who lacked such skills. Furthermore, the life skills acquired during incarceration facilitated for their economic empowerment thus transformed their lives for positive livelihood benefits. This was reflected by ex-offender B's positive story of making use of the wood work skills acquired to change his economic status and improve life for the better. It was observed that non-formal education facilitated for the immediate application of the skills for some of the offenders, hence the reaction for adaptive outcomes. Additionally, their sharing of common experiences enabled for their sharing of one identity that was led by their incarceration, though at different times. They are therefore identified as one community that is excluded from the wider population that also facilitates the inclusion amongst the inmates' incarcerated community.

The findings of this study point to the social identity that ex-offenders share, which also reflects the strong cohesion and a sense of belonging to them. The formation of an ex-offenders association is a collective group identity, which is a strength that can be used to motivate offenders to engage in other economic empowerment activities. Similarly, non-formal education responded to the transformative outcomes where an association for ex-offenders was established, which promoted their identity while also

serving as a long term link for other released offenders and their communities. The following recommendations were therefore made.

- It is recommended that in addition to the literacy and numeracy programmes that are provided to the offenders, non-formal education curriculum be developed in a way that will address offenders' situations by taking into account their social capital strength of loyalty, support and caring, but also the curriculum should entail their wider social skills and ways to build their public image.
- It is recommended that offenders be given the social learning skills for immediate application in order to facilitate for livelihood opportunities upon their release from custody.
- It is recommended that that a strategy be implemented to enable effective consultation with offenders to avoid the skills imposition. Alternatively the best practice of needs assessment and evaluation that is happening with Swaziland inmates, be copied and implemented with Lesotho's inmates for their educational programmes.
- There should be a holistic approach to learning, rather than a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy, such as income-generating skills that can be aligned to locally available resources for the start-up of their businesses. Offenders learning should target the immediate application (Rogers, 2004) of their skills once they are released from prison.

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