



Prison Education: A Chance for Social Rehabilitation for Convicts? Selected aspects of Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

During the process of social re-adaptation of convicts, education comes as exceptionally significant factor. The lack of education makes social re-adaptation more difficult and it can also contribute vastly to recidivism. Acquired qualifications and professional competences decrease the risk of unemployment and they reinforce economic independence of convicts. They become tools which can be applied to prevent social exclusion and boredom. The significance of prison education for convicts is reflected in directives and penitentiary policies of many European countries, including Poland. The aim of prison education is to increase chances for successful social re-adaptation, improvement of moral attitudes in convicts and their self-respect.

Keywords: Education, Convicts, Re-integration, Penitentiary Measures, Social re-adaptation, Social rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

Convicts are a specific group which is particularly exposed to social exclusion. Convicts are often characterised by lower abilities to function properly in the society, by tendencies towards negative assessment of their reality and future and by pessimistic attitudes towards life in general [1]. The lack of activities in prison isolation negatively affects convicts' self-esteem and perception of the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the social value of prison education and the size of the article, the material discussed here can be viewed as a starting point to some more in-depth analysis. The article can become a starting point for further considerations in that field and for a discussion in the fields of education,

social re-integration, methods applied in working with convicts, viewed in a broader context of occupational activation of prisoners.

Social re-adaptation of convicts can be much more difficult without education, vocational training or their readiness for fast retraining. Lack of education and professional qualifications make convicts especially vulnerable to recidivism. Acquired through education, professional qualifications and skills minimize the risk of unemployment, provide development of self-reliance and increase convicts' self-esteem. Prison education and work become important tools to prevent social exclusion and to eliminate boredom during imprisonment. Education of convicts becomes both: A privilege for convicts and their responsibility undertaken for themselves and for the society. Education helps convicts to develop and to understand the need of learning. It offers new prospects and it becomes a life-long challenge and a demanding task. During the time spent by convicts in prison, constant changes take place outside the prison walls: things keep changing in the fields of knowledge, new technologies or communication tools. Education of convicts follows the idea of life-long learning and allows them to keep up with technological advancement and with constantly developing reality.

Education of convicts improves self-esteem; it helps to believe in themselves and their own capabilities. Prisoners can become convinced that success is achievable. Education comes as a form and as a tool used against marginalization and social exclusion of convicts. The process of social re-adaptation of convicts should be constantly supported by social rehabilitation education based on teleology oriented towards transformation in the fields related to personality disorders [2]. In order to achieve that aim, the system of education provided at penitentiary institutions should meet convicts' needs and expectations.

Research studies indicate that education in prison is an effective way of reducing recidivism rates, however, unfortunately, benefits of prison education programs, rates of education within prisons still remain low in many countries. The opponents of changing this situation argue that prison education is a waste of money and that prisoners do not deserve the right to be educated.

Implementation of processes related to education of convicts, who are social misfits-students, is not an easy task. It comes as a challenge to both: social rehabilitation theory and practice. All activities undertaken by social rehabilitation counselors and educators should be correlated with theoretical concepts of social rehabilitation pedagogy. The results of the research clearly indicate the significance of education provided to convicts during the process of their social preadaptation. Education is of penitentiary and rehabilitating nature, it modifies convicts' attitudes, it improves their self-steering abilities, autonomy, it transforms their systems of values and it activates their causal reasoning.

Education dedicated to convicts should be well adjusted to their needs and to the specificity of their current reality. It should allow them to continue their education at higher education institutions if they are interested in such possibilities. Unfortunately, the idea of social re-adaptation, social re-integration

and acquiring values through education is often forgotten. Still, it is better to educate convicts, to provide them with values, to teach them the sense of right and wrong, to provide them with understanding and wisdom rather than keep them in permanent isolation, counting days to the moment they go out free. Convict who have completed their education, and who set a good example to be followed, provide a priceless value to other inmates.

As a form of activation, education of convicts is translated into conditions for the optimal use of time spent in prison isolation. It becomes a real chance for convicts to develop positive habits and to implement some favorable and meaningful changes into their lives. At the same time, it strongly determines the future of convicts; it indicates new fields of their functioning after they leave prison and opportunities which most of them have not even been aware of before. A concept of prison education and its place in the system of occupational activation of convicts has been under constant development. It comes as an important element applied to overcome passive attitudes in convicts and to motivate them to find employment. Education of convicts prevents and eliminates risk related to numerous economic and social problems. Thanks to the acquired knowledge, convicts can re-enter or enter the labor market, they can meet their financial liabilities, they can improve or establish their social relations. Convicts become aware of the significance of education in reality and its value on the labor market. This value is directly translated into positions taken at work, professional development and earnings obtained for work. Education and work become significant; they become highly estimated and desired values.

Prison education is a cost-effective way to reduce crime and it leads to long-term benefits. Education can give people a voice; it can open doors to a better future, and restore individuals' self-esteem and social competence. Investing in education provides the greatest benefit to the society as a whole, and ensures that all people - regardless of their past - are given an opportunity to thrive in the future. Education could be a gateway to social and economic mobility. In Poland all convicts who stay at penitentiary institutions and custody suites have the right for education. It is guaranteed and regulated by relevant legal acts. The fundamental aim of all the in the penitentiary system solutions is to eliminate negative consequences which result from social exclusion and which are related to negligence in convicts' previous education [3]. The legal acts guarantee to acquire qualifications and they get a chance for social re-integration.

A decision about starting education must be made by convicts voluntarily. In Poland convicts are most interested in education provided by prison vocational schools. They come as the most popular choice because convicts are provided with actual opportunities to obtain occupational qualifications and to find employment after they leave prison. The most important aims of education provided at penitentiary institutions include covering gaps in education, preparation to an occupational career which should help convicts to find employment after they leave prison, improvement in convicts' self-esteem, elimination of recidivism and minimization of risk related to social exclusion after convicts leave prison.

Prison schools and education centres established at penitentiary institutions and custody suites provide convicts with all education levels, except for higher education. Convicts may exercise their rights to continue their education outside prison and it is in compliance with the current legal regulations. The network of prison schools provides education opportunities to juvenile convicts under obligatory education and to convicts who voluntarily apply for education. Every year prison education centers organize courses for 3 500 or 4 000 convicts approximately. Education programmers are mainly dedicated to juvenile convicts and convicts who serve their first imprisonment sentences. The access to education is not restricted for other convicts who have been classified in other groups if they only wish to continue their education in various curricular and extracurricular forms.

The number of places at prison schools allows all convicts who need education to take advantage of the opportunities to learn. While planning operation of prison schools, the emphasis is laid on providing convicts with a chance to graduate from a primary school and a junior high school, because it is necessary to continue one's education. The number of places at prison schools provides all convicts willing to learn with opportunities to obtain education at the above-mentioned levels.

Education of convicts is supplemented with training courses organized at penitentiary institutions. The courses are dedicated mainly to adult convicts who have not got any occupational skills or who need vocational retraining. The courses are offered, first of all, to convicts whose imprisonment sentences will end soon, in order to increase their chances to find employment after they leave prison and to reduce their exposure to the risk of recidivism. The courses are usually organized in cooperation with employment agencies and their scope is adjusted to the requirements of the local labor markets [4]. The most popular courses are those which offer vocational qualifications in the following occupations: a roofer, a cook, a house painter, a carpenter, a gardener and a paver. Vocational courses cannot stand for the complete process of education. They allow convicts to acquire some particular qualifications necessary to find and to maintain their jobs. Vocational courses come as a significant complementation of education dedicated to convicts with short sentences.

Apart from the solutions mentioned above there are also programmers of occupational activation, under which educational activities are implemented. Solutions applied in Polish penitentiary institutions can be divided into two groups. The first group includes projects of the national and international scope. These are programmers such as: POWER, Work for Prisoners, Norway Grants. The second group includes original projects and solutions applied at custody suites and penitentiary institutions in Poland. They have been developed by employees of penitentiary institutions. Such programmers are implemented with the support of some external entities, such as hospices, employment agencies, career counselors, probation officers or social welfare centers.

Education in European prisons is often far less than it could be, mainly as a result of two related oversimplifications: instead of seeing 'a whole person' in a prisoner, people can see only a criminal and

rather than offer adult education in all its challenging richness, learning is reduced only to a limited range of 'skills'.

Effects of prison education courses have been found to be cumulative; research studies show that the more classes an individual takes while in prison, the less likely they will be to re-offend. Higher level qualifications are associated with lower re-offending rates. In Italy, Denmark, Norway, Finland, France and Germany convicts are offered opportunities to learn and to continue their education. Apart from education, penitentiary institutions of Western Europe offer a wide range of additional activities which allow convicts to learn more and to acquire new skills which can be beneficial in the world that keeps changing dynamically. Such activities include, among others, painting, drawing, sculpture courses and foreign language courses. Penitentiary systems are highly developed and convicts can meet in rooms which are dedicated for people who share the same interests (Finland) or convicts can participate in various discussion forums to discuss films or theatre plays (Sweden, England). There are numerous differences in the field of prison education between the countries of Western Europe and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. It was long ago when the western penitentiary systems recognised the need for education of convicts and for development of their occupational interests. Convicts who wish to start learning at any education level obtain support from their penitentiary institutions. They are offered opportunities for education, financial and education specialist help. Education opportunities for convicts who serve their imprisonment sentences in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are much worse. The range of the education offer is very limited and it includes courses preparing convicts to trades such as basket weaving, bricklaying, carpentry, sewing, installation and equipment fitting, etc. Activities related to culture and education is very often limited to watching television, reading books and periodicals and to some occasional group meetings (only to celebrate Christmas or Easter) or during walks in the prison yard. In Russia, walking in the open yard is often a dream because keeping some convicts permanently inside is still practiced. Western Europe, however, offers different conditions to prisoners.

The United States indicates the highest rate of incarceration in the world, so it spends a lot of money to maintain prisons. It is important to create opportunities to decrease the expenses. Education for convicts is not the only factor that affects recidivism and it is strictly connected to positive outcomes for post-release employment. Prisoners who have participated in correctional education programs have 43% lower odds of returning to crime than those who have not. In addition, the odds of securing employment after releasing from prison have been higher for those who have participated in correctional education programs. In the case of education and work-related programs, benefits far outweighed the costs of such programs. Benefits to the state include decreased costs associated with new crimes and recidivism as well as increased revenues, as formerly incarcerated individuals have found employment and have become taxpayers .

Research studies on education for convicts indicate the fact that properly designed and implemented educational programs have the potential to reduce recidivism and to create safer communities. They

also provide financial benefits to states that struggle with the high financial and social costs of incarceration. Education provides essential literacy skills, assists inmates in completing high school credits, or prepares inmates for high school equivalency exams. Many correctional education programs include special education and related services. Prison education also includes vocational education, which is often tailored to the requirements for certification or licensure in a particular profession or industry, such as culinary arts, barbering, or welding. Very few learners in prison have access to the Internet so it is difficult to develop technology skills that are important for seeking and maintaining employment.

Education for prisoners gains priority in many countries. It is a means to emancipate people from abuse, unemployment and poverty. Education for prisoners is not a waste of tax payers' money but it has a socio-economic value. It is also possible to observe some problems in that field, including the following: lack of proper motivation for learning and for improving qualifications, gaps in school education which can be even as long as several years, deficiencies in applying methods and techniques of intellectual work, lack of intellectual work habits, problems in acquiring basic notions and massive difficulties in learning, limited access to source materials, poor resources of prison libraries, lack of proper places dedicated to intellectual work, reading, self-education, limited access to educational aids.

Education of convicts is defined by various directives and penitentiary systems of European countries. Generally, European countries wish to provide high quality education at prison schools and they recognise the significance of education applied as a tool to prevent recidivism and to prepare convicts to better life in freedom. Well-organised education increases chances on the labour market and it contributes to long-term social integration of convicts.

Experience and activities implemented under the penitentiary systems of the European countries, including Poland, indicate the significance of prison education and its importance to successful re-adaptation. Education contributes to the empowerment of convicts, provides them with actual chances for efficient social rehabilitation and helps to overcome the stereotypes and prejudices against former convicts which still function also on the labor market. It is also a challenge to educators, social rehabilitation counselors, psychologists and to the judicial system.

Education is an important tool to prepare convicts for participating in their social and family life, for taking responsibility for themselves and for other people, bearing consequences of their own decisions. All activities focused on education include a number of actions oriented towards the achievement of an aim which is successful re-adaptation of convicts. This observation refers to knowledge, skills and also to social competences.

In accordance with a model of normalization accepted in the European Prison Rules and an aim of punishment which also involves preparation of convicts to life outside prison, it is necessary to limit

negative effects of imprisonment and to eliminate differences between life in prison and life in freedom. The process should be implemented by providing convicts with opportunities for development of their skills and abilities which can increase their chances for social re-adaptation after they leave penitentiary institutions. It is necessary to use work, training, education and physical exercises in individual programmes to achieve the above-mentioned results. Individual corrective programmes should be developed immediately after convicts are admitted to their penitentiary units. Such programmes should be developed with the consideration of convicts' individual needs, knowledge, abilities and predispositions. Each penitentiary institution should provide all convicts with an access to education programmes which should be as comprehensive as possible, and they should meet convicts' individual needs, including their aspirations.

As the European legal regulations indicate, penitentiary institutions should implement education programmes in order to increase chances for social re-adaptation of convicts, to reinforce their moral attitudes and their self-esteem. Prison education should be integrated with the general education system to allow convicts to continue their education after they leave prison. It is recommendable to allow convicts to learn at education centers outside prison if it is possible. Penitentiary institutions should provide convicts with proper conditions for education, including access to libraries and educational resources. On executing life-long imprisonment and other long-term imprisonment sentences, any forms of education and training should be supported and awarded. Some particular emphasis is laid on occupational training [5]. Education and occupational training should be prioritized over work activities. Education should be placed in the very center of the penitentiary system. The culture of education should be started on the first day of the imprisonment sentence. Each convict should be strictly evaluated in terms of their achievements in education.

Indication of solutions adapted in various countries can become a starting point for a discussion on the condition and meaning of education for convicts. It can form a platform for a dialogue between representatives of various disciplines which may result in some valuable solutions applied by the Prison Service in other countries. It emphasizes the necessity of undertaking in-depth research in that field. It poses some questions too: what should be changed in education for convicts? How to prepare people who work with convicts? How to use experience and solutions applied in other countries? These questions should be discussed in an interdisciplinary way.

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