

LEARNING NEEDS OF PRISON INMATES AND PERSPECTIVES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The right to education is fundamental and must be provided to all without restriction. Distance learning methodologies present key learning opportunities for those with limited access to conventional education, such as prison inmates, and come in response to the demand for new solutions in the field of educational activities. The ever-increasing need for new forms of education highlights distance learning in prison schools as a key pillar of the new learning process. Education in prisons as a way of reintegrating offenders is an essential means of changing behavior patterns as well as for acquiring knowledge and developing-improving skills, while aiming at the smooth professional integration of inmates. The present study presents a review of distance education in prisons, as well as qualitative research examining aspects related to distance education in a prison of central Greece, which includes observation as well as interviews with thirty-six inmates. The results of the qualitative research show that Greek language courses are essential for reading, writing and communication with more teaching time for developing - improving the skills of the inmates. Distance education is an essential tool for inmates to acquire the necessary skills for social reintegration and smooth professional integration.

Keywords: Incarcerated adults, prison school, cognitive and social skills, distance education, instructor, educational material.

INTRODUCTION

Education in prisons is “any educational activity that takes place while a person is under the control of the criminal justice system” (Carver and Harrison, 2016). It is important that there is learning behind bars, as many institutions of incarceration do not educate but punish (Novek, 2019). Everyone has the right to access to vocational and continuing education and to be provided with the opportunity to attend compulsory education free of charge (Westrheim and Manger, 2014).

Prison education is a cost-effective way to reduce crime and has long-term benefits for the entire population (Bender, 2018). According to the RAND Corporation (2016), incarcerated individuals are 43% likely to

not return to prison when participating in any type of education program (Bender, 2018). Imprisonment is a classic example of a critical experience that can lead to a state that overturns an individual's previous certainties. (Mezirow, 1991). To this end, distance education is not merely a means of knowledge transfer, but a catalyst for personal transformation. Education can facilitate critical self-reflection among inmates, encouraging them to examine the beliefs and behaviors that led to their criminal act. The distance learning approach, with its asynchronous tools, provides the necessary time and space for this process. By offering new knowledge and skills, the education program allows inmates to develop new perspectives on themselves, society, and their future reintegration (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow's theory focuses on the purpose of education—why we teach—namely, personal and social transformation.

When designed in accordance with the principles suggested by Knowles (1980), distance education for inmates can have an enhanced effectiveness. Inmates' self-direction is strengthened, as they better manage their own time and progress, which is vital in an environment with limited autonomy. Knowles's theory provides the principles for designing the educational program (how to teach). Learning can be "problem-centered," highlighting skills that will aid in professional and social reintegration after release. Thus, when based on the principles of Andragogy aiming at transformation, distance education can serve as a powerful tool for the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates.

Good Training Practices

In the period 2000-2011, the European Commission promoted the Grundtvig Program and in particular 113 programs on education and training in prisons, as part of a broader economic and social strategy, within the European project "Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Lifelong Learning Programs". These programs recognized the role of lifelong learning and skills development in addressing the economic crisis in the European area and promoted it across Europe, facilitating the exchange and adoption of common practices by creating collaborative links between states (Hawley et al., 2013).

Norway has implemented an online program with a continuation of the Grundtvig project entitled: "Cooperation in Prison Education - Learning in a Network Environment (PIPELINE)" and a sub-program called "Internet for Inmates". The objectives of the sub-program were to improve the quality of education in prisons by enabling prisoners to access and use information and communication technology. The results of its implementation show that by 2010 it was ensured that inmates in all prisons in the country had access to Internet through a national network, in accordance with the security requirements of each prison environment. To improve effectiveness, there was a categorization of websites into more than a hundred categories (Hansen and Breivik, 2014).

Bateman (2010) argues that the implementation of the Virtual Campus in UK Detention Centers provides a secure online platform that offers a range of learning opportunities for offenders. The system is implemented in accordance with the government's most stringent security standards and provides inmates with access to areas of employment linked to the educational programs used in the UK. The Virtual Campus uses a dedicated information management system, with guidance and support for learners in the Detention Centers, aiming to significantly reduce the risk of reoffending upon release. The Virtual Campus offers a broader curriculum based on personalized learning, supported by distance learning tutors in collaboration with external organizations. The system supports learners to continue their studies and access learning materials after release, maintaining a portfolio. The Virtual Campus has received ministerial approval for national deployment to all Correctional Institutions in UK.

Prisoners attending programs at the UK Open University use their time constructively and more importantly they can move away from the bad influence of prison (Purcell, 1987). The UK Open University is a pioneering institution in terms of how to reach socially excluded groups, such as prisoners. With its open policy it is carving new 'pathways' not only for people aiming for higher education, but also for prison education specialists (Tait, 2021).

In Germany, between 2001 and 2008, 121 development projects were promoted under the European EQUAL initiative, which focused on enhancing the occupational absorption of released prisoners by testing innovative ways of working and reducing recidivism. In this context, two programs, Mabis and Zubilis DP,

implemented in 11 German prisons are considered particularly noteworthy as they provided individualized support to prisoners on appropriate training and vocational rehabilitation opportunities after release, and also helped to build strong links between released prisoners and post-prison organizations (Hawley et al., 2013).

In Ireland, the personal development needs of prisoners determine the choice of curriculum so that prisoners take personal responsibility for their education. Thus, partnerships are established and active participation in small groups or pairs is promoted to support prisoners (peer-to-peer) and resolve their differences. Learning tasks are tailored to each student's abilities with the aim of changing their way of thinking and acting with personal development to become good citizens (Hansen and Breivik, 2014).

Education and Training for Adult Prisoners in Greece

Educational activities within detention facilities are a complex and diverse process Szifris et al. (2018) due to security difficulties encountered and due to the unpredictable nature of the trainees/detainees Rogers et al. (2014) possibly due to institutionalization. Difficulties are encountered in the educational processes within detention facilities in many parts of Europe for a number of reasons: the education provided does not recognize the personality of the detainees, the conditions of detention, the prisoners' experiences before and during their imprisonment, the abrupt transfer of prisoners from prison to prison, the lack of infrastructure (libraries, teachers and educational materials), the lack of access to information and internet technologies, and the communication difficulties due to different nationalities of prisoners (Tzatsis et al., 2019).

In Greece, adult prisoners who aspire to complete nine years of compulsory education can benefit from 11 Second Chance Schools. Twenty scholarships for studies at the Hellenic Open University are available annually to prisoners. Most of the educational programs are under the auspices of external institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, the Labor Employment Organization (OAED), the Hellenic Open University and NGOs (European Prison Observatory, 2019).

The objectives of Second Chance Schools are: to reconnect learners with education and training systems, to develop a positive attitude towards learning, to acquire basic knowledge and skills, to enhance personality and to access the labor market (Papaioannou et. al., 2016). There is also an increase in the number of vocational training programs under the auspices OAED. In 2018, at least seven such programs were offered, on cooking, air conditioning maintenance and building maintenance. More such programs are still planned to be offered. In fact, vocational training schools (IVT) are operating in several detention facilities (Artinopoulou and Kamarakis, 2019). According to data from the Ministry of Justice in 2017, almost 10% of the prison population (about 1000 prisoners) who were active students have attended the above training programs: 87% of them participated in primary, secondary or vocational education programs, while 13% were enrolled in higher education programs (Artinopoulou and Kamarakis, 2019).

These supplementary programs aim to develop language skills, either in Greek for migrants/refugees or in foreign languages for Greek detainees. There are also programs for the development of mathematical skills, as well as music, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and history (Stumpou and Raikou, 2021).

The Normative/Legislative Framework of Prisoner Education and its Implementation in Practice

Czerniawski (2016) suggests that there is a gap between the political rhetoric of the right to education in prison at European level and the implementation of this right in prisons in the UK. Conflicting views develop within a policy framework that supports, on the one hand, the fight against recidivism, the need for imprisonment and therefore prison education, and the protection of human rights. On the other hand, it addresses the global recession, economic cuts and the creation of moral panic about crime. The policy framework in England and Wales is contradictory and contested. The neoliberal policies implemented by policy makers in the UK continually reduce educational benefits for prisoners (Czerniawski, 2016). While there is an international legal and regulatory framework that upholds the right to education for prisoners, the report highlights the significant gaps between these legal frameworks and practical implementation.

Many countries struggle to make this right a reality. Practical obstacles that make it difficult to effectively implement education, despite legislative provisions. These include: a) Lack of adequate teaching spaces, libraries and technological equipment, b) Inadequate or lack of specialized educational and support staff, c) Financial constraints affecting the funding of educational programs, d) Rigid or unsupportive prison policies, which often prioritize security over education, e) limited access to educational resources, including the internet (when permitted), f) the noise, overcrowding and stressful environment of prison make learning difficult (UNESCO, 2021).

In the US in the late 1990s, policymakers continued to reduce educational opportunities for the growing number of prisoners. Funding reductions intensified during the 2008 recession, resulting in “dramatic reductions in the number of programs offered, the size of classes, and the number of inmates participating in those programs. Despite research demonstrating the value of prison education and public statements by many leaders that educational support is essential to the successful reintegration of former prisoners, the concept of prisoner education remains a matter of political controversy and its financial support remains deliberately undefined (Novek, 2019).

As far as Greece is concerned, the developments in the issue of prisoner education show that there is no organized plan with long-term objectives and properly adapted to the needs of the Greek prison system to strengthen the educational process of prisoners. However, the passing of the law on the creation of educational units in all prisons, as well as the gradual emergence of the Second Chance Schools (S.C.S.) in prisons over the last twenty years, with the prospect of their universal establishment in all penitentiary institutions in the country, are evidence of a real, albeit slow, progress (Misirli, 2020).

Distance Education of Prisoners

According to Salane (2008) the main advantage of distance education is the great ability to adapt to any situation and therefore to that of the prisoners. One aspect of distance education that presents serious problems for student prisoners in French detention centers, is the need to be able to manage their time (Salane, 2008). The Council of Europe argues that the case of the Open Universities of UK and the Netherlands is distinguished by the use of audiovisual material and especially by the face-to-face communication between the tutors and the prisoners. The funding of studies is necessary because the prospects of attending are greatly enhanced if tuition fees can be provided (Council of Europe, 1989). According to postgraduate prisoners in Norway, the existence of discussion groups and participation spaces for ‘intellectual discourse’ is non-existent (Wilson, 2010). Remediating the need by accessing a virtual learning community does not satisfy student prisoners in the Detention Centers in England because they want to feel that they are ‘part of something more than that’ (Wilson, 2010).

Anadolu University is the biggest e-learning project in Türkiye in terms of the quantity of the provided contents. The Internet based drill and practice software project of the open education system of Anadolu University is the biggest e-learning project in Türkiye in terms of targeting and reaching numbers of students. Therefore, the students can easily access the textbooks and TV programs (Demiray et al., 2023). As well known that continuous professional development activities and refreshing workplace addressing instructional ICT use can be helpful to improve with regard to Teaching-Learning Methods, Learning Communities, E-learning and E-interaction. Providing pre-service teachers with meaningful and instructional ICT use experiences carries importance since they cannot be expected to implement what they did not experience. In addition, rather than the quantity of PC experience, type of ICT experience matters. Finally, administrative precautions can eliminate the negative findings observed in technical and social issues (Akbulut, 2008).

Another advantage of distance education, for prisoners, is that it is much more feasible to continue the course if they have been transferred from one prison to another or if they have been released from prison. Distance learning, when combined with face-to-face education, minimizes and ultimately eliminates its disadvantages, while promoting its wider effectiveness in the education system (Markellos, 2001; Diaz & Entonado, 2009). Blended learning provides the additional benefit of direct interaction and increased social presence. The characteristics of blended learning are: attitude towards technology; online interaction; flexibility; attitude towards online learning; face-to-face learning in the classroom (Vaughan, 2007; Mc Gee & Reis, 2012; Poon, 2012; Kerres and Witt, 2003; Harris et al., 2009; Stodel et. al., 2006; Howard,

2009; Rahman et al., 2020). Encouraging prisoners to actively participate in development programs and to continue their studies is aimed at the development of their personality as a whole. Prisoners should have direct access to information in an organized teaching that includes practical elements (appropriate forms of education) so that the prisoner can manage his or her education in the confinement environment. Research suggests that education is critical to improving many long-term aspects of life for prisoners, their families and communities, with reductions in recidivism, increased employability and earnings upon release (Vera Institute of Justice, 2019).

In Portugal, the 2013 legislation emphasized the importance of prisoners' participation in training courses, with a particular focus on distance university education, although little progress has been made (Moreira et al., 2017a; Moreira et al., 2017b). On the contrary, in Africa, access to digital technologies in prisons is limited or non-existent (Farley et Murphy, 2015). At the same time, in several Asian countries with poor economic conditions, justice policies are highly punitive and without any restorative logic (Baros et al., 2021).

Research on distance education in French, English and Scandinavian detention centers using case studies illustrates the different structures in distance education programs provided in prisons (Salane, 2008; Pike, 2010; Wilson, 2010; Watts, 2010). The findings show that prison education has elements of flexibility and adaptability, but also operational challenges (Linardatou and Manousou, 2014). In practice, it seems that the implementation of distance education is seen as pedagogically inappropriate in the prison environment due to many issues related to material resources, to communication with tutors and to the prison environment (Salane, 2008).

EDUCATION IN PRISONS: BACKGROUND

Benefits of Training for Imprisoned Individuals

Filling of the “dead time” in a creative way, the reconnection with the educational process, the acquisition of new skills, the contact and cooperation with instructors who come to prison from the “outside” society, have a beneficial effect on the personality of the prisoner. In the prison context, education opens a window of communication, relieving the prisoner from the suffering of confinement and preparing him for social integration. In order to learn effectively, a student needs to feel that he is in a safe environment, so as to be committed and to feel that education becomes a bridge between him and society as well as an internal bridge for what he feels and the way he can express it (Dimitruli and Rigoutsou, 2017).

Prison education aims to: a) reconnect with the educational process; b) minimize the “suffering of incarceration”; c) creatively fill dead time; d) acquire social and basic skills; e) acquire new skills; f) find employment after release from prison; and g) reduce crime (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). Therefore, incarceration in prison should not deprive each individual of the right to education, while at the same time it should create an obligation for the prison administration to ensure him/her participation in the educational process, with terms and conditions as close as possible to those of free life (Behan, 2014; Brosens et. al. 2015; Costelloe, 2003; Halimi et al., 2017; Mahger et al., 2019).

PURPOSE

This study investigates the potential of distance education to address the literacy and vocational training needs of incarcerated adults with low educational attainment and to foster critical thinking and communication skills relevant for their social reintegration.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The prison of the city of Larissa in central Greece and in particular the Second Chance School (SCS) of Larissa was chosen as the site of this qualitative case study research, because of its central location and accessibility. Gaining access to the research site is one of the most important challenges in the research process, especially

when studying sensitive and special populations such as prisoners (Labaree, 2002). The participating students in the Greek language course were 36 incarcerated adult males: there were 16 participants in the beginner trainee group (indicated as A1-A16 in Table 2), 16 participants in the advanced trainee group (indicated as P1-P16 in Table 2), while four students in the Greek language course (indicated as F1-F4 in Table 2) were attending it online, since they were attending in parallel distance education undergraduate programs of the Hellenic Open University with scholarships, and had therefore the means for online participation.

Motivation to Engage with the Topic-Theoretical Interest

The investigation of the educational profile and the educational needs of the prisoners was the main motivation to engage with the implementation of activities with new teaching manuals in the context of face-to-face and distance learning, according to their educational needs and the development of skills in systems beyond formal learning. Using principles of adult education and distance learning, teaching interventions aimed at linguistic communication and comprehension of Greek language were carried out through the application of alternative teaching methods.

Research Questions and Approach

The research questions are:

1. What are the characteristics and needs of incarcerated adult learners to develop skills at cognitive, social and digital levels?
2. What is the educational process and methodology for acquiring skills?
3. How is the role of the adult educator shaped during the learning process with a group of incarcerated adult learners?
4. Which alternative forms of education can be used and how can they help in the learning process, considering also the creation of printed and digital educational material?

In this research, the qualitative case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate for data collection, mainly since it is an effective tool for the examination and deeper understanding of social and cultural reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The educator (who is a co-author of this study) participated in the reflection of the participating trainees, participated in their learning experiences and therefore understood the deeper aspects and dimensions of the problem; she also came to authentic, multifaceted conclusions and avoided static and distancing herself from the issue (Cohen et al., 2011). According to Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995), a qualitative case study seeks to understand a particular phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. It can help in the development of already active teachers by improving teaching skills, developing learning methods and analytical ability, as well as contributing to increasing the level of self-awareness (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

The data collection methods for this research included: (a) participant observations, recorded in field notes/ research diary, and (b) interviews (informal, formal, semi-structured, individual and group) conducted in the prison school (Mason, 2011). Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2012) was followed, which is suggested for case studies. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows the researcher to focus on the data in numerous different ways. The use of thematic analysis was selected since it allows to legitimately focus on analyzing meaning across the entire dataset, or to examine one particular aspect of a phenomenon in depth. It allows to report the obvious or semantic meanings in the data, or to interrogate the latent meanings, the assumptions and ideas that lie behind what is explicitly stated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The many forms thematic analysis can take means that it suits a wide variety of research questions and research topics. One of its advantages is its 'theoretical freedom' or 'flexibility', as it does not require the researchers to commit to specific epistemological positions, as is the case with other qualitative analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). The core of thematic analysis lies in its ability to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data, allowing for a rich description and interpretation of participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Thematic analysis provides a systematic and analytical framework for the coding and organization of data. Through repeated engagement with the data familiarization, initial coding, the

generation of themes, and their subsequent review, it allows to uncover deeper meanings that transcend superficial responses (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). This approach ensures the valid extraction of conclusions, revealing themes such as the transformative role of education and the reintegration challenges faced by prisoners.

Research Details

After completing the theoretical part and reviewing the existing literature, the research model was formulated, which guided the empirical analysis. The model directs the research along four axes: the first axis refers to Learning Conditions/Learner Characteristics, the second axis concerns the Learning Process, the third axis focuses on Role of Educator and of Peers/Motivation and Difficulties, and the fourth axis refers to the learning material and relates to the learning process (Creating Multimodal Educational Material). Regarding the fourth axis, since the research model focuses on the distance learning of incarcerated adults, the learning material is specifically designed for such methodology. Table 1 shows the main axes to which the research questions are assigned with their dimensions (Manousou, 2007; Lionarakis, 2005; Simonson et al., 2019; Smald and Zvacek, 2019; Clark and Mayer, 2016; Rowntree, 1994; Moore, 1994; Perraton, 1988; Holmberg, 1988; Peters, 1988; OU, 2023; Mayer, 2014).

Table 1. Research axes-questions and dimensions

AXIS 1	AXIS 2	AXIS 3	AXIS 4
Learning Conditions/ Learner Characteristics	Learning Process	Role of Educator and of Peers/ Motivation and Difficulties	Creating Multimodal Educational Material
Difficulties and Obstacles	Special Needs, Adult Educator, Learning Material	Cognitive-Vocational- Economic, Psychological Field	Printed and Digital Material
It includes questions about how the sample inmates perceive the difficulties and obstacles, the concerns during the course. Also, their views on their fears or dissatisfaction of the course, and the possibility of studying after the course.	It includes questions with which the inmates of the sample express their opinions-experiences about their motivation for learning, their presence in school or their absences, the role of the teacher and the first request-need they submit to the teacher.	It includes questions expressing their opinions and experiences, as well as the attitudes of the inmates regarding the reasons for attending Greek language courses. Also, questions about the possibility of communication with classmates and the teacher, as well as about the difficulties in language-communication-time.	It includes questions and activities so that the incarcerated trainees, through a fruitful dialogue, identify their learning needs in order to create multimodal educational material that will meet them.

The axes presented in Table 1 were developed through a clustering of specific topics (initial codes) that were formed from the thematic issues that were identified in the responses of the respondents (these initial thematic issues are presented in Table 2, together with the coded questions and answers of the respondents). Below is a thematic map for the creation of the axes which includes the main topics identified leading to the development of each axis, noting also the relevant references/theory on which these topics are based.

Axis 1: Learning Conditions/Learner Characteristics

This axis focuses on the personal experience of the incarcerated individual as a learner. The research did not just examine if they want to learn, but also why and under what conditions. It delved into their motivations, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, following Self-Determination Theory. It was defined through the following topics:

Topic 1: Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation: This topic based on theory is fundamental to understanding human motivation and helped in interpreting which motivations are more likely to lead to a successful learning journey. The researchers analyzed how inmates express their motivations. Some of their answers were, “to improve myself,” or “I like to read.” These responses suggest intrinsic motivations, which lead to deeper and more meaningful learning. In contrast, answers like, “to get out of prison faster,” or “to find a job after release,” suggest extrinsic motivations, which may be more powerful initially but don’t lead to long-term commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Topic 2: Motivation Patterns and Moral Values: Beyond intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, the researchers examined how the inmates’ moral development influences their decision to learn and how they perceive education as a means for personal change and reintegration. According to Kohlberg’s theory, learning can help them develop higher levels of moral reasoning, beyond simple rule compliance (Kohlberg, 1984).

Axis 2: Learning Process

The goal under this axis was to identify the obstacles that create problems for effective learning. The relevant analysis was multi-layered, examining not only personal but also systemic obstacles. The axis was defined through the following topics:

Topic 1: Psychological Obstacles and Social Isolation: Under this topic, responses expressing fear, insecurity, or dissatisfaction were examined. These emotions are often the result of previous negative educational experiences. Furthermore, the researchers analyzed how social isolation or prison culture, such as the fear of exploitation, can hinder participation, since understanding the psychological barriers for inmates is essential for creating a supportive educational framework (Mezirow, 1991).

Topic 2: Learning and Trauma (Trauma-Informed Practice): Many inmates have a history of traumatic experiences, which affect their cognitive function and emotional regulation. The researchers analyzed how these experiences can be obstacles to concentration, memory, and participation. The data analysis revealed fears or avoidance related to past traumas. This approach was used to understand how the neurobiological effects of trauma influence inmates’ ability to learn, providing a theoretical tool for interpreting psychological barriers (Bloom & Farragher, 2010).

Topic 3: Conditions as Obstacles: The researchers identified how environmental conditions, such as the lack of quietness or the absence of privacy, affect learning. The “learning space” theory highlights that the physical environment is a critical factor for effective learning. The need was pinpointed for a supportive and appropriately designed learning environment (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015).

Axis 3: Role of Educator and of Peers/Motivation and Difficulties

Under this axis the goal was to examine the impact of social relationships on the prison learning environment. It was defined through the following topics:

Topic 1: The Educator as a Mentor and Facilitator: The researchers analyzed responses referring to the relationship of inmates with the educator. Do they see educators as an authority figure or an ally? According to Brookfield, adult educators should act as facilitators, not just “teachers,” emphasizing the importance of collaborative learning and mutual trust (Brookfield, 1986).

Topic 2: Communities of Practice: The interactions between inmates were investigated under this topic. Was there evidence that they learn from one another, either informally through discussions or formally through group work? Wenger’s Communities of Practice theory explains how groups of people who share a common interest or problem can learn collectively. The group dynamic influences the learning process in an environment like a prison, where social bonds are particularly important. The researchers delved into the role of the educator-learner relationship and group dynamics, using mediation theory (Wenger, 1998).

Topic 3: The Educator as a Mediator of Knowledge: Beyond the role of facilitator, the educator acts as a mediator between the inmate and new knowledge. According to Vygotsky, learning is a social process. The educator must guide the inmate into the “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky, 1978).

Topic 4: Collaborative Learning and Social Capital: Group work and interaction within the classroom create social capital. The bonds that inmates develop can help them build a support network, not only inside prison but also after their release. The learning communities in prison act as positive factors for socialization and reintegration (Putnam, 2000).

Axis 4: Creating Multimodal Educational Material

This axis was defined through the following topics:

Topic 1: Multimodality and Material Design / Visual Literacy: Under this topic, responses were examined regarding the format of the material (print and digital). Multimodality as a concept suggests that knowledge is transmitted through different modes (text, image, sound). The researchers analyzed if inmates prefer a combination of media and why. According to Kress (2010), different modes of communication like text or an image have different meanings and can enhance learning because learners have different needs. The value of visual literacy in the education of incarcerated adults was examined, especially for those inmates with reading difficulties. The analysis showed how the use of images or videos helps understanding while creating a more engaging learning environment.

Topic 2: Developing Material Based on Needs: The process through which inmates participate in the creation of material was analyzed. This approach, known as participatory action research, gave a voice to the learners, ensuring that the material truly met their needs, thus increasing its effectiveness and giving the research a direct and practical outcome (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Research Conditions and Limitations

The Greek language training programme that formed the basis for the research process had several difficulties due to the prison context and was carried out with great effort by the tutor and the participating prisoners. The difficulties were due to the following reasons (Blaauw et al., 2000; Mears and Aron, 2003; Winters, 1997; Drosou, 2016).

- Different ages, different levels of education and interests of the prisoners. Inmates have diverse characteristics, different backgrounds, origins and lifestyles.
- Different nationalities of inmates and communication problems due to language. Most are foreigners with refugee or migrant backgrounds and origin from countries in South West Asia, North West Asia, Africa and especially North Africa, the Middle East, Balkans and a few Greek Roma.
- The educational level of the prisoners is low and there are high illiteracy rates; many prisoners left their education and their country due to war/conflicts, and have bad educational experiences.

There are different sections in each prison ward which creates difficulties of “attachment”. They have diverse characteristics, they face problems in developing social relationships, cognitive and emotional skills and have low self-esteem.

Finally, the courses provide knowledge of general education and are not linked to the needs of the labor market. Inmates have skills that emerge during participation and attendance in school programs.

Interview Questions of Incarcerated Adults

The initial questions, used to initiate discussion with the incarcerated adults were the following:

1. Is it difficult for you to learn the Greek language? How do you feel when you make a mistake in the Greek language and what do you hope to achieve by learning Greek?
2. What do you consider to be the greatest difficulties in learning the Greek language? Are there any factors that negatively affect your progress in learning the Greek language?
3. Do you use the Greek language to communicate with each other? What difficulties do you face and how do you feel when communicating with your classmates in Greek?

4. What difficulties do you face during your Greek lessons and what are the problems you face in oral and written expression and what are the difficulties?

These questions were followed up by more specific questions, which are included in Table 2 below presenting the analysis of responses.

Reliability and Validity

Significant help was provided by recognized international and Greek scientific journals, as well as conference proceedings, reports and research articles and organizations, but also current articles from reputable international educational websites, educational materials and resources from the Hellenic Open University. The diversity of sources results from the study of both theoretical texts and human resource research (Becker, 1967) Performed (methodological triangulation) – gathering data using different collection methods 55 data, such as observation of students in the classroom and interviews with a sample of students or groups of students (Denzin 1989; Altrichter et al., 2001). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985, op. cit. in Woods, 1999), a key element of qualitative research is “demonstrating that the findings of the research effort and the interpretations given by the researcher are credible in the eyes of those involved in the research process”. The researcher, after completing the collection of notes during the interview, sent each interviewee the text of their interview, in order to check and validate what was written and verify their reliability. Indeed, the vast majority of survey subjects responded immediately giving permission to use the information as is. In some cases, minor corrections were made to the partially transcribed text and based on these the data was analyzed. Thus, the confirmation of the research findings by the participants themselves (participant validation) was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, to ensure validity and reliability during the qualitative data analysis itself, the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994) was adopted. This model provides a systematic and transparent framework for managing and interpreting data through three concurrent, interconnected processes: (a) Data Reduction: The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data derived from interviews and observation notes. At this stage, the researcher organizes the vast amount of information, isolating the essential elements that address the research questions. (b) Data Display: The organization of condensed data into visual formats, such as tables, matrices, graphs, or flowcharts. This visualization allows the researcher to systematically perceive the information and identify patterns, relationships, and trends that would not be apparent in continuous text. (c) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: The process of interpreting the organized data and continuously verifying the emerging conclusions. The researcher does not simply draw final conclusions but constantly tests them against the data, looking for alternative explanations and ensuring that the findings are grounded in the reality of the field. The application of this model ensured that the analytical process is auditable and systematic, thereby enhancing the objectivity and reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The difficulties that the incarcerated trainees face in their learning process are mainly the lack of time, the needs for provision of teaching assistance and the urgent need for appropriate educational material. Problems identified are related to adapting to the prison environment and to communicating to meet daily needs, due to a lack of understanding of the Greek language. Difficulties are greater when the code of communication is specific, such as the code of prison guards or lawyers. These findings are in line with the research of Toch (1975) and are associated with the “suffering of incarceration” and institutionalization (Vergopoulou and Dakopoulou, 2017; Perraki, 2017). Similar findings are reported by Brubacher et al., (2023), since learners need to acquire collaborative skills based on communication, and in particular respectful conversation, conflict management and recognition of each other’s contribution to the group. Through communication, interaction and mutual support, social skills are improved (Elton, 2021) and friendly relationships are developed, which enhance group cohesion and bonds between group members. Prisoner testimonies report that:

Table 2. Sample interview table with coded questions, answers and themes

<p>Problems during the learning process</p> <p>Question: What scared you the most during teaching?</p> <p>Thematic issues</p> <p>Lack of time; fears about the learning process; fear of changing or removing the teacher</p> <p>(A3): "I'm thinking about whether the learning process will be enjoyable or difficult for me. I've tried in the past but I didn't succeed, maybe it will happen now too, but I'll try now that I can, even though it's difficult..."</p> <p>(A4): "If another teacher comes, I might not understand and I will have difficulty, but in difficult situations, the strong and the weak are visible. Cooperation and trust, that's what I want, that's what I seek in school, that's why I come to school. I want to learn; I will fight for it."</p>
<p>Difficulties in lessons</p> <p>Question: Did you encounter any difficulties during the lessons?</p> <p>Thematic issues</p> <p>Lack of time; provision of teaching assistance; imperative need for the existence of educational material; attitude of other inmates</p> <p>(A1): "I don't understand how quickly time flies, time is chasing us, something is always chasing us, but now that we can, we have to learn. A second chance that is worth taking advantage of in every way, the possibility exists. I will fight for it..."</p> <p>(A3): "I want more time, to write and read better. It's hard not to have a book, I need it, I have to have it with me. They don't leave us in the cell only at school. Something we need is a book, a book for us, for our needs. We need to understand and not be made fun of."</p>
<p>Study after teaching</p> <p>Question: Is there a possibility of studying after school lessons?</p> <p>Thematic issues</p> <p>Difficult conditions in prison; lack of peace; alternative ways of learning as a solution</p> <p>A1): "The conditions do not allow us to study in the cells. There are many of us and it is noisy. We should have other possibilities of learning in other ways here... everything is difficult and no one else knows it except us who live it. Because we live and have rights."</p> <p>(P1): "If I had the ability to carry material to the cell, I might be able to study in the cell. I want to read in the cell too, but I have a hard time doing it. It's not that easy, because there are many of us and I want peace and quiet. Other places help, so I can read and not in the cell. If I could read during quiet time and had material, everything would be easier."</p> <p>(P2): "When there is quiet, I manage to read, even a little. I would like a separate table and chair there in a corner... And books, to read but... Someone will understand our own need, to read, to learn, to make a new beginning, which will start at school, but will continue in prison."</p>
<p>Fears about the learning process</p> <p>Question: Did you feel afraid during the lessons?</p> <p>Thematic issues</p> <p>Fear of change and movement; transfer; fear of not completing tasks; insufficient support; lack of help from classmates; importance of motivation</p> <p>(A2): "The fear of lack of time, but also the fear of failure. Also, a diffuse anxiety and dissatisfaction with myself. I am afraid that I will not have enough time to complete the work at school. Time may be short for me. I think about how different things would be if we had a few more hours of class. I would have solved all my questions. I am struggling, but in my life everything has been difficult. Now I want to make the right choices without fear, as long as I understand correctly and fairly like the rest of you who know Greek."</p> <p>(B1) "I'm thinking about whether I'll have enough class time to learn what I need to know. I feel insecure with time... Will I catch up easily or will I forget?... The chase of time... always time chasing me..."</p> <p>(A3): "I get upset and beat myself up when I don't succeed, because others might understand more easily and faster, while I don't learn to write and read Greek. I'm given the opportunity and I want to do well. I'll learn to write and read and if I don't succeed I'll try again... I found myself in a school that was a dream for me. It's difficult but I won't give up, I'll fight it..."</p>

Needs during the learning process and demands in relation to the teacher

Question: What are the needs during the lessons and what is your relationship with the teacher

Thematic issues

Shortages in appropriate educational material, both printed and digital; need of personal assistance (personalized education) from the instructor; trust in instructor's personality; Distance education as a solution

(A1): "If the teacher could deal with each of us individually, everything would go faster. We would have personal help. When the teacher understands our needs, we feel more satisfied. We need personal help from the teacher. The other students are doing better { } but I and some others want more help to learn to write and read, like the rest of our classmates."

(A4): "I trust my teacher, but when she is absent or I am absent, I don't want to lose track of my lessons. I want to be able to make up for them, even from afar. This gives me the strength to continue. When we find the lost hours, we can and do learn better. I don't know where I'll be if they take me from here, if I move, and then I don't want to get lost, I want to continue learning, to continue what I started. All teachers must help us, so that we don't lose our lessons, even if we end up in another prison, even when we come out into society"

(A5): "Only with the right material do we learn properly! We need books, images, learning sounds. We must not lose the continuity of the lessons. Sound and image help me, I understood that from the first lessons."

Internet access capabilities

Question: What are the possibilities of using the internet?

Thematic issues

Insufficient internet use; internet access issues; need for distance communication with teachers; communication needs

(F2): «Internet access is limited to non-existent for our work. Time and resource constraints force us to not make effective use of the internet.»

(F1): "Online education opens up new horizons for learning within the incarcerated environment. Although it provides me with the opportunity to access educational materials and communicate with teachers, through technology there are also challenges, such as limited access to the internet and the distance from personal contact with teachers."

(F3): "I used to not like the internet connection, but for me now it is a necessity. It certainly works in relation to the student's level of willingness and is a good way of communicating. Distance Education works with difficulties. We have problems connecting several times in combination with the limitations"

Unpleasant situations during the learning process

Question: What unpleasant-difficult situations did you face during the lessons?

Thematic issues

Time; duration of courses; reading place/space

(B2): "Difficult circumstances, I want a quiet environment or an easier way to read in the time I manage to sometimes find. This wastes several hours of study time that could have gone into our lessons. The best thing for me would be to be able to study other hours besides school hours; I don't have enough time, it stresses me out, but I try. If they change the hours and make them longer, I will do better. It would be great to have another room to read in."

(F3): «We inmates read in a variety of conditions, depending on where we are and the availability of space. Most of us try to create a study space in our cells, where we can concentrate without interruptions"

(F1): "In prisons, the "study space" can be either our cell, if we have a private space, or the shared library, or the reading room. Studying usually takes place in limited periods of time, during free time or educational programs.

Although we face challenges, such as limited access to the library or lack of privacy, we try to create an atmosphere of concentration and study by using various strategies, such as prioritizing and time management"

A pervasive anxiety and self-resentment exist among the inmates. They have a fear of not completing schoolwork, but also of not having enough support and assistance, especially from their peers. They believe that class times are incomplete and that they have a great need for continuity in the learning process. The application of group learning can be used to reduce their fears and to help them focus on themselves, as no other educational practice shows so many benefits at the same time. Group learning is based on discovery and application techniques (Courau, 2000), used in group learning activities in all areas of education. The responses of the students on challenges they face, focused on the fear of not completing the tasks, the fear of moving –

switching prisons, but also of insufficient support and assistance, especially from the co-learners. Furthermore, the respondents stress the need for continuity of the learning process, which is in agreement with the findings of Vriza & Karadimitriou (2020) and Nicolaides (2016) regarding the advantages of learning in groups, as communication and collaborative skills are developed through dialogue. Through communication, interaction and mutual support, social skills are improved, and friendly relationships are developed, which strengthens group cohesion and bonds between group members. According to Jaques (2004), learners are also provided with the opportunity and freedom to study meaningfully, in breadth and depth, while having the opportunity to develop skills to manage real-life problems that are tested in their daily lives.

According to Mezirow (2006) the need for change, according to the principle of transformative learning, is the main human-centered model of reform. It can only be realized through a process of self-reflection and transformation. However, according to Illeris (2016) there are many cases where transformative learning cannot happen under the given circumstances and, sometimes, the process of learning (critical reflection) happens only following hard efforts. The main reasons for attending school are identified as communication, learning, cognitive processes, sense of freedom, self-esteem, but also gaining benefits (daily wages) as a motivation. Absences are rare, and are only due to illness, because incarcerated learners feel guilty and fear the consequences. Inmates combine the concept of correction and the learning process with showing a good behavior. The findings agree with those of Behan (2014) since education helps prisoners to escape from their daily routine, interact with their fellow prisoners, and adapt to an ominous environment. According to Zhubreva (2016) and Illeris (2016) the motivation of trainees is an important element as it can determine the success (or failure) of the learning project of distance as well as of face-to-face education.

Inmates seek rehabilitation, but want to obtain the benefits (wages) of attending the program. According to Freire (1977) the focus of critical consciousness is on developing adults' ability to reflect on their experiences, and to ask critical questions by challenging pre-existing knowledge, resulting in a change of their way of thinking. The findings are consistent with the study by Kendall & Hopkins (2019) who noted that learners are learning to read and write while critically reflecting on their socio-cultural context.

Distance learning as a learning process could provide a solution. The learning needs of the enrolled people are related to additional teaching hours, the lack of appropriate printed and digital teaching materials, different teaching methods, the use of the internet and enriching learning styles. They show unlimited confidence in the teacher. These findings agree with Zawacki-Richter et al. (2022) highlighting that the pedagogical dimension of distance education comes to complement, enrich and strengthen the teaching and learning process. According to Kelenidou et al. (2017), distance education can be a main or a complementary mode of education in a particular learning environment, such as a prison school, with positive effects on student performance, compared to conventional education.

These findings also agree with Tonseth & Bergsland (2019) since motivation for education is key, as it is seen as one of the most important ways to master life after leaving the correctional facility. It is an important factor in crime prevention. Prisoners combine the concept of correctional education and the learning process and are careful not to deprive themselves of school, considering it a value and a second chance. Costelloe & Warner (2014) and Van Wyk (2014) also note that most prisoner note that the education and skills development programs were out of their reach prior to incarceration. Prisoners' confidence in the importance of education in meeting their needs showcases the potential of prison education to promote individual empowerment. According to Duckworth & Gross (2020) individual empowerment should be experienced as a sense of personal change and growth, which is manifested through behavioral change. "... It's all that school gives you that's important" and "...what we learn may not give us a job when we get out, but school helps us to think properly". This testimony demonstrates the inmates' perception-awareness of the value of school and their expectation of transformation.

Regarding the role of the adult educator, the findings are in line with Jarvis (2006) who argues that he/she has to perform educational, teaching, psychological and even administrative work to cope with the task as a trainer of vulnerable groups. To this end, an inmate testimony suggests that: "If another teacher comes, I may not understand what I hear and I will find it difficult, but in the difficult times the strong and the weak are seen. Cooperation and trust is what I want, that's what I look for in school, that's why I go to school. I want to learn; I will fight for it."

Ryback (1998) and Goleman (2000) suggest that a quality that makes a trainer stand out is emotional intelligence; according to Cranton and Carusetta (2004), it is honesty, as well as authentic behavior. The present findings are in line with the above as well as with Eumorfopoulou and Lionarakis (2015) who note that in distance education the instructor must have skills and practices that will allow him/her to effectively design and organize multimodal training materials and activities through which learners will interact. Novek's (2019) study demonstrates that although educational support is essential for the successful reintegration of ex-prisoners, the concept of prisoner education remains a matter of political debate and financial support for it is still deliberately undefined.

The notions of versatility and flexibility are intrinsically attributed to e-learning (Fragaki and Lionarakis, 2011; Tsitlakidou and Manousou, 2013), as added values that provide new dimensions to the educational process. E-learning offers the possibility for students to participate in educational programs from which they would normally be excluded, while offering an efficient way for educational institutions to expand their capacity at lower costs (less infrastructure and instructors).

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines aspects related to distance education in a prison of central Greece. The findings can contribute to the expansion and improvement of education in prisons to address the unemployment and lack of hope that lead them to criminal acts. Greek language lessons are necessary to learn to read and write, but also for communication purposes. During the learning process, there was a strong need expressed by the learners for more teaching time. Education is an aid in their monotonous daily lives while forming a safer detention environment. There is a clear contradiction: on the one hand, incarcerated trainees feel free in school and on the other hand, they "lock" their minds in the face of potential failure.

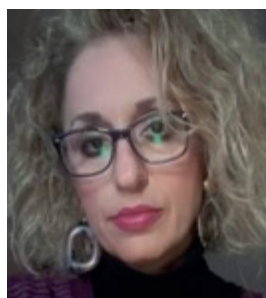
The development and improvement of skills and competences aims at social reintegration and smooth professional integration. Excessive stress, fear, insecurity, dead time, institutionalization, withdrawal and depersonalization, the 'evils of confinement', make it difficult to improve conditions of detention. Changes linked to individual empowerment include literacy skills - cognitive, social and digital - for a better life after release from prison. For most prisoners, education and skills development programs prior to incarceration were beyond their means. The opportunities they have are significant in cultivating vocational and literacy skills, and even to obtain a university degree with scholarships from the Hellenic Open University.

Learners at all levels are asking for more training, learning materials, both printed and digital, and personalized teaching. Educational programs through complementary distance learning aim to empower prisoners and emancipate them for independent living. Prisoners should have opportunities to choose educational programs themselves and direct their own learning. Correctional facilities should provide targeted interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

The present study is a first step towards the creation of educational material according to the needs of the prisoners in printed and digital form, highlighting the importance of Distance Education in the field of education in prison. Communication needs are an issue for most inmates despite the difficulties they face in oral and written language. Instructors need to focus on the most important information from the instructional materials to be acquired by the students in the long term. Individual empowerment is experienced when education provides a solution to the vulnerability of prisoners by equipping them with skills, attitudes and behaviors so that they can be fully incorporated in society and live as law-abiding citizens after release.

An interesting suggestion for future research would be to design another study that would thoroughly examine the new expanded role of the incarcerated trainee. It is also proposed to design and conduct a research study examining the attributes and learning specificities of the group of incarcerated adults in distance education.

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