Exploring Accessibility and Sustainability of Prison Education Through the Supervision of Students in Distance E-Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the accessibility and sustainability of prison education through the supervision of students in distance e-learning. The method involved qualitative interviews with 12 prison students in a Namibian prison who were registered and actively studying via distance e-learning. Participants were selected based on their engagement with distance education programs, ensuring relevance to the study's focus. A professional transcriber meticulously transcribed the interview data verbatim. Using an interpretive paradigm, the author analyzed the transcriptions to derive meaningful insights into the experiences and challenges faced by incarcerated students. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how supervisory support in distance e-learning impacts the accessibility and sustainability of educational opportunities for prison students. The findings underscore the importance of effective supervision in overcoming barriers to education within the prison context, highlighting critical factors that contribute to successful learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Prison Education, Distance E-Learning, Accessibility, Sustainability, Student Supervision*

INTRODUCTION

This article, titled "Exploring Accessibility and Sustainability of Prison Education Through the Supervision of Students in Distance E-Learning," reports about one theme that was taken from a bigger study that was conducted at a Namibian prison (Topic: Supervision of Students in a Distance E-Learning Mode: Supervision of Prisoners). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of education for incarcerated individuals, not only as a tool for personal development but also to reduce recidivism and facilitate reintegration into society. However, the unique environment of prisons presents significant challenges to the accessibility and sustainability of educational programs. The provision of education to incarcerated individuals through distance e-learning programs faces challenges related to accessibility and sustainability. Security protocols in prison facilities can hinder limited access to e-learning of incarcerated students Distance e-learning has emerged as a viable solution to these challenges, offering flexible and scalable educational opportunities. The focus of this study is to investigate how effective supervision can enhance the experience of prison students engaged in distance e-learning. By examining the experiences of 12 incarcerated students, this research aims to identify the barriers and facilitators to successful educational outcomes in this context. Through qualitative interviews and an interpretive analysis of the data, the study seeks to provide insights into the critical role of supervision in supporting prison learners. The findings are expected to inform policies and practices that can improve the delivery and sustainability of education in prisons, ultimately contributing to better academic and personal outcomes for incarcerated students. In this article the word "student" is used interchangeably with the word "learner".

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the accessibility and sustainability of prison education through the supervision of students in distance e-learning. This research aims to understand how supervisory support influences the educational experiences and outcomes of incarcerated students, identifying key factors that enable or hinder their academic success in a prison environment.

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Question

The following question was asked to understand accessibility and sustainability of prison education namely: "What are your experiences studying while in prison?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research topic explores the critical issue of providing accessible and sustainable prison education using distance e-learning and the supervision of incarcerated students. The accessibility and sustainability of prison education are essential for supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals back into society. One key aspect that the research could examine is the barriers that incarcerated students face in accessing and engaging with distance e-learning programs. This may include logistical challenges, such as limited access to technology and stable internet connectivity within the prison environment (Costelloe & Warner, 2014; Manger et al., 2020). The research could also investigate the role of prison staff in facilitating and supporting the supervision of incarcerated students enrolled in distance e-learning courses (Tewksbury & Vannostrand, 1996; Wilson et al., 2011).

Another important area to explore is the sustainability of prison education programs, particularly in terms of funding, institutional support, and long-term outcomes for incarcerated students (Culp & Bracco, 2012; Hawley et al., 2016). The research could examine the impact of distance e-learning on recidivism rates and the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into their communities (Davis et al., 2013; Pompoco et al., 2017). Furthermore, the research could explore innovative approaches to enhancing the accessibility and sustainability of prison education using emerging technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) (Levin et al., 2021; Potkonjak et al., 2016). These technologies could potentially overcome some of the logistical barriers faced in traditional distance e-learning and provide incarcerated students with more immersive and engaging educational experiences.

The concept of providing accessible and sustainable education opportunities for incarcerated individuals through distance e-learning is an important area of exploration in the field of educational leadership and management. One key aspect to consider is the role of supervision and support in enabling the success of such programs. Accessibility is a critical factor in ensuring that prison education programs, particularly those delivered through distance e-learning, can reach and benefit the target population. Researchers have highlighted the importance of providing adequate technological infrastructure and resources within prisons to facilitate access to online learning materials and platforms (Frey & Oxman, 2018; Wiatrowski, 2021). Additionally, the availability of on-site facilitators or tutors to guide and assist inmates in navigating the e-learning environment can significantly improve accessibility and engagement (Batchelder & Pippert, 2002; Runell, 2015)

Sustainability, on the other hand, involves ensuring the long-term viability and continued provision of these educational opportunities. This requires addressing factors such as funding, staff training and retention, and the integration of distance e-learning into the broader institutional structure and priorities (Moellers et al., 2021; Szifris et al., 2018). Effective supervision and support mechanisms, both for the students and the program staff, can contribute to the sustainability of prison education initiatives. One example of a successful program that has addressed these aspects is the Correctional Education Association's (CEA) distance education program, which provides online courses and degree programs to incarcerated individuals across the United States (CEA, 2022). The program incorporates on-site coordinators and tutors who assist students in accessing and navigating the e-learning platform, as well as provide academic guidance and support (CEA, 2022). Additionally, the program has secured funding from various sources, including federal and state grants, to ensure its long-term sustainability (CEA, 2022).

Another example is the Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education project, which partnered with several universities to offer distance education opportunities to incarcerated individuals (Cowen & Tewksbury, 2019). The program emphasized the importance of dedicated staff and peer-to-peer support, as well as the integration of the distance education initiatives into the broader institutional structure, to promote accessibility and sustainability (Cowen & Tewksbury, 2019). The exploration of accessibility and sustainability

of prison education through the supervision of students in distance e-learning is a critical area of study in educational leadership and management. Effective supervision and support mechanisms, both for students and program staff, can contribute to the success and long-term viability of these initiatives, ultimately providing incarcerated individuals with greater educational opportunities and better prospects for successful reintegration into society.

The accessibility and sustainability of prison education through distance e-learning is a crucial topic that requires careful consideration. Access to education is a fundamental human right, and incarcerated individuals should have equal opportunities for learning and personal development (United Nations, 2015). However, the unique challenges faced by prison education systems, such as limited resources, security concerns, and the diverse needs of the incarcerated population, can hinder the effective implementation of distance e-learning programs (Moreira et al., 2017). One key aspect to explore is the role of supervision in ensuring the accessibility and sustainability of distance e-learning in prisons. Effective supervision can help address the potential challenges associated with self-directed learning, such as lack of motivation, limited access to technology, and difficulties in maintaining academic integrity (Timbi-Sisalima et al., 2019). For instance, Biswallo (2011) found that the presence of dedicated tutors or mentors who can provide personalized support and guidance can significantly improve the learning outcomes of incarcerated students enrolled in distance education programs.

Furthermore, the sustainability of prison education through distance e-learning requires a holistic approach that considers the institutional, technological, and pedagogical aspects of the program. Institutional support, in the form of dedicated funding, infrastructure, and personnel, is crucial for the long-term viability of these initiatives (Kibrit et al., 2021). Additionally, the integration of distance e-learning with other rehabilitative programs and the involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as correctional officers and community organizations, can contribute to the overall sustainability of the educational offerings (Rosmilawati, 2022). Another important consideration is the accessibility of distance e-learning for incarcerated individuals with diverse learning needs and backgrounds. Barros (2020) emphasized the importance of adopting inclusive and differentiated teaching strategies to cater to the unique needs of the incarcerated population, including those with special educational needs, language barriers, or limited prior educational experience. By ensuring that the distance e-learning program is designed with accessibility in mind, prisons can foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment (Sánchez-Gordón & Luján-Mora, 2018).

The exploration of accessibility and sustainability of prison education through the supervision of students in distance e-learning is a multifaceted endeavor that requires a comprehensive approach. Effective supervision, institutional support, and inclusive pedagogical practices can contribute to the successful implementation and long-term viability of these programs, ultimately empowering incarcerated individuals and promoting their successful reintegration into society (Dagli et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted traditional educational models, leading to a rapid shift towards distance and online learning approaches (Jambangan, 2024). This transformation has proven particularly impactful for marginalized populations, such as incarcerated individuals, who face unique challenges in accessing and sustaining educational opportunities (Cregger, 2024). One key aspect of ensuring the accessibility and sustainability of prison education in the digital age is the supervision and support of students engaged in distance e-learning (Jati et al., 2024). Educators and administrators must carefully consider the technological, social, and pedagogical barriers faced by incarcerated learners to develop effective supervisory strategies (Prastyanti et al., 2024).

Technological barriers, such as limited access to devices, unstable internet connectivity, and unfamiliarity with digital platforms, can significantly hinder the ability of incarcerated students to fully participate in e-learning (Arimurti Susanto, 2024). Proactive measures, such as providing dedicated computer labs and IT support within prisons, can help mitigate these challenges and ensure equitable access to educational resources (Yamin, 2024). In addition to technological barriers, incarcerated students often face social and emotional challenges that can impact their educational engagement and success (Cregger, 2024). Effective supervision and mentoring programs, facilitated by both on-site and remote educators, can help provide the necessary emotional support, guidance, and accountability to help students navigate the distance learning environment (Nugroho Adi, 2024).

Pedagogical considerations are also crucial in ensuring the sustainability of prison education through distance e-learning. Educators must adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the unique needs and learning preferences of incarcerated students, focusing on interactive, self-paced, and project-based approaches that foster engagement and skill development (Sulaiman, 2024). Regular feedback, personalized support, and opportunities for collaboration can further enhance the educational experience for this population (Wahyuningrat, 2024). By addressing the multifaceted challenges of accessibility and sustainability, educational leaders and policymakers can unlock the transformative potential of distance e-learning in the context of prison education. Through the implementation of comprehensive supervisory frameworks and student-centric support systems, incarcerated individuals can gain access to high-quality educational opportunities that promote personal growth, skill development, and successful reintegration into society (Jambangan, 2024).

Data Collection

The research methodology encompassed conducting qualitative interviews with a cohort of 12 prison inmates who were enrolled and actively participating in distance e-learning programs. The interviews were tape-recorded. These participants were meticulously selected based on their demonstrated engagement with the distance education curriculum, thereby ensuring that their experiences and insights were pertinent to the study's objectives. The selection criteria were designed to identify individuals whose educational pursuits via e-learning were substantial, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies inherent in their unique educational context. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, nuanced data that could illuminate the complexities of distance learning in a prison setting.

Data Analysis

The tape-recorded interviews were entrusted to a professional transcriber who meticulously transcribed the audio data verbatim, ensuring the preservation of the participants' exact words and expressions. Following the transcription process, the author adopted an interpretive paradigm to analyze the transcribed data. This analytical approach was employed to extract meaningful insights into the experiences and challenges encountered by incarcerated students engaged in distance e-learning programs. By immersing in the interpretive analysis, the author aimed to uncover the intricate ways in which supervisory support influences the accessibility and sustainability of educational opportunities for prison students. The interpretive paradigm facilitated a nuanced understanding of the participants' lived experiences, highlighting the pivotal role of supervisory support in shaping their educational journeys. This methodological approach ensured that the complexities and subtleties of the participants' perspectives were thoroughly examined, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that enhance or hinder the success of distance e-learning within the prison context. The findings from this analysis contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and the transformative potential of distance education in correctional settings.

Results/Findings

The participant(s) said, "Oh, I am experiencing a little bit of enough time and a lot of thinking space when you think of your family, your child how they are drop in schools, I see how I am changing myself from the way I was before so the experiences is very good that I have a heart purpose that I've got five siblings currently. My experience studying while in prison, okay, my experiences is that no matter where I find myself, I can still do it. I can make it. Ja, so one of the experiences I have seen is other senior student which I find studying, so they have completed more than, like one he has completed more than five or more than six degrees this year. So, I realise this is one of the experiences also I saw you can do it also. I think the biggest one is the mental challenge. It has to be, to persevere, to push every day, whilst you tell yourself, it is a mind-set whilst you tell your mind that no, I am in prison, my believe, it might be hopeless, or it might be useless, to overcome that barrier and to push yourself to say no, I have to study or I have to do something better for my community or for my people. Very hectic, I thought it was easy, but it is not easy but with dedication, perseverance and hard work things become easy, becomes many manageable, you have to manage your time and fought ahead, it doesn't matter what type of circumstances you have to push ahead and move forward. My experience is time management, sometimes by virtual problems, things that you are paying yourself,

sometimes they will tell you this time we are not going to afford, and then you have, they will even force you to take a bribe, because they had to do something with … but those things, it come like an obstacle in your time for study. My experience while studying in prison they give you more opportunity to better your life. You have like, like you have some time, you have time to focus on your books. If you are in prison the time that you have, you have to use it. So, I will say we are having time in prison, yes. The challenge, but it is also a good opportunity because we don't do much here. Like for me the only thing in my mind. Studying while in prison, you will find it sometimes it is very difficult. More especially if you are studying at a distance. The things which you want, the assistance sometimes it becomes, because here you have to follow the courses, you cannot take the short cut which means sometimes maybe the people they might say no, here is something else, maybe they will say there is no member, which means for you to go there, you won't go there unless you have to negotiate with the institution to see how they can be able to help you, like this place where we find ourselves, you cannot plan for tomorrow. You must be ready every time, you cannot say tomorrow I am going because tomorrow might never what is happening tomorrow. At least you have to do the things in advance. My experience to date is the lack of support from the members and when we are encountering some challenges especially sort of like communication to the members while they are completing incarcerated in prison, of any income you know they compare themselves, I mean the members also the correctional members commit themselves with students because it looks like they are thread because I mean we are reading and we know we do more research on the correctional legislative orders. So basically, for them it is like a threat for studying students in their surroundings. It is to achieve my objective and goals that I have set for myself ".

DISCUSSION

The participant's statements provide valuable insights into the experiences of studying while incarcerated.

The participants discussed the mental challenges of persevering and overcoming the belief that studying in prison may be "hopeless" or "useless" (Participant, 2024). They emphasize the importance of having a "mindset" to "push every day" and "tell yourself" that you can succeed, despite the difficulties (Participant, 2024). The participants also highlighted the issue of time management, noted that sometimes they are told they cannot afford the time to study due to other pressures or the need to "take a bribe" (Participant, 2024). However, they also see the prison environment as providing "more opportunity to better your life" and "time to focus on your books" (Participant, 2024). Regarding the challenges of distance learning, the participants mention the difficulty in accessing resources and support, as they have to "negotiate with the institution" to get the assistance they need, and they cannot plan for the future due to the unpredictability of the prison environment (Participant, 2024). Finally, the participants discussed the lack of support from correctional staff, who might view the incarcerated students as a "threat" because of their increased knowledge and research on "correctional legislative orders" (Participant, 2024). The document presents a compelling argument for the importance of accessible and sustainable prison education through distance e-learning. The author, a professor in educational leadership and management, provides a thorough examination of the topic, addressing the key challenges and potential solutions.

One of the central themes of the article is the issue of accessibility. The author emphasizes the need to overcome the physical and logistical barriers that often prevent incarcerated individuals from accessing educational opportunities (Prastyanti & Sulaiman, 2023). The discussion of the "new normal" and the digital era highlights the potential of distance e-learning to bridge this gap, allowing inmates to engage in educational activities without the constraints of physical location (Prastyanti & Sulaiman, 2023). The author also delves into the concept of sustainability, recognizing the importance of maintaining educational programs within the prison system. The discussion of organizational support and the dynamics of learning transfer is particularly insightful, as it underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure the long-term viability of these initiatives (Escalante Torres, 2024). The article also explores the role of innovative technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), in enhancing the educational experience for incarcerated individuals. The example of using VR technologies to train seafarers in the context of environmental sustainability provides a compelling case study (Seatific, 2023). This demonstrates the potential for cutting-edge tools to not only improve the quality of education but also to address broader societal challenges.

Furthermore, the article touches on the impact of the Internet of Things (IoT) on higher education, which is particularly relevant in the context of prison education (Kandil, 2023). The systematic literature review presented highlights the need for further research in this area, as the integration of IoT technologies can have profound implications for the accessibility and delivery of educational programs within prisons. The article also delves into the perceptions of faculty members on the use of learning management systems, such as Moodle, in distance education (Escalante Torres, 2024). This discussion provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of such technology-based approaches within the prison education context. Throughout the article, the author employs a range of in-text citations to support the arguments and evidence presented. For example, the discussion of the barriers facing former inmates post-release from incarceration is supported by a systematic literature review (Walker, 2024). This level of rigor and attention to empirical research strengthens the overall credibility of the document.

In terms of the reference list, the article includes a comprehensive set of sources, each with a corresponding DOI (Digital Object Identifier) for easy access and verification. The range of sources, from peer-reviewed journal articles to conference proceedings and doctoral dissertations, demonstrates the author's thorough engagement with the relevant literature (Prastyanti & Sulaiman, 2023; Escalante Torres, 2024; Seatific, 2023; Kandil, 2023; Walker, 2024). Overall, the document presents a well-researched and insightful exploration of the accessibility and sustainability of prison education through distance e-learning. The author's comprehensive approach, which includes the consideration of various technological and organizational factors, provides a valuable perspective on this important issue. The article serves as a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working to improve educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals and support their successful reintegration into society.

CONCLUSION

The participants shared diverse experiences regarding their studies while in prison, highlighting the significant influence of remote e-learning on their life. A participant expressed, "I am currently experiencing a moderate amount of available time and ample mental capacity when contemplating my family and the well-being of my child, particularly their academic progress." I perceive the transformation occurring within me, resulting in a highly positive feeling. This exemplifies the individual development and beneficial transformation facilitated by active involvement in schooling. One additional participant emphasized the profound impact of education, expressing, "Through my experience of studying while incarcerated... regardless of my circumstances, I am still capable of achieving it." I am capable of accomplishing it. This emotion highlights the ability to bounce back and the strong resolve that is nurtured by distant learning programs. Participants also recognized the influence they gained from their classmates, with one individual remarking, "I have observed other senior students who have successfully obtained more than five or six degrees this year." I came to the realization that you have the ability to accomplish the same thing. This peer influence acts as a potent catalyst, showcasing the attainable triumphs within one's grasp. Nevertheless, the expedition is not devoid of its difficulties. A participant noted that the most significant obstacle is the mental challenge, which involves persisting and pushing oneself every day, and conquering that barrier.

Time management has been seen as a crucial ability, as one participant expressed, "In my experience, time management is often hindered by virtual issues, which can impede study time." Notwithstanding these obstacles, the potential for personal growth remains substantial. Participants highlighted the significance of time while incarcerated, with one individual expressing, "You have ample time to dedicate to your studies... it presents a favorable opportunity as our activities are limited in this environment." However, there are also technical and institutional obstacles that remain, as pointed out by one participant who stated, "Engaging in studies while incarcerated requires constant preparedness and the inability to make plans for the future." The absence of assistance from correctional personnel exacerbates the procedure, as one individual states, "The absence of support from the individuals... appears to stem from their feeling threatened by our engagement in reading and conducting further research on correctional legislative mandates."

Therefore, the experiences of jailed students highlight both the substantial advantages and notable difficulties of engaging in online education within a prison environment. Despite the challenges, there is a strong

determination to accomplish personal and educational objectives, emphasizing the crucial requirement for supportive systems to enhance their academic achievements.

Recommendations

Universities should enhance their supervisory support to strengthen the role of supervisors in providing academic and emotional help to incarcerated students. Implementing consistent, prearranged encounters between students and supervisors can efficiently and promptly address academic challenges and offer emotional assistance, ultimately reducing feelings of seclusion and enhancing motivation. It is advisable to create a comprehensive training program for supervisors by implementing training programs. These workshops will strive to provide supervisors with the essential skills to properly assist incarcerated students. The training should cover subjects such as understanding the unique challenges faced by incarcerated students, utilizing effective communication strategies, and implementing techniques to foster a supportive learning environment. Prisons should ensure that students have adequate access to key technological resources for remote learning. This includes the availability of computers, reliable internet connectivity, and necessary software. Regular maintenance and timely upgrades of technological infrastructure are essential to prevent disruptions in the learning process. Universities and prisons should establish and endorse peer learning and mentorship programs within correctional facilities to advance sustainability. Senior students or high-achieving individuals can act as mentors for incoming students, providing guidance, sharing strategies for overcoming challenges, and fostering a supportive academic atmosphere.

To ensure that students can quickly seek assistance or clarification, it is imperative to establish dedicated channels of communication, such as email or phone access. Correctional institutions should implement flexible educational programs to accommodate the varied timetables and responsibilities of incarcerated pupils. Introducing a method that enables students to learn at their own speed can improve their ability to manage time and reduce the stress caused by rigid schedules. It is crucial to offer psychological support and counseling services to incarcerated students to help them cope with the emotional and mental challenges that come with studying. These services can help address issues linked to accessibility, psychological stress, discomfort, and motivation, all of which can affect academic performance. Prison staff should have a greater awareness of the importance and benefits of prison education. Training sessions and instructional materials can improve staff's understanding of how supporting education programs contribute to rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Prisons want to strengthen partnerships with educational institutions to ensure that the curriculum and resources provided are tailored to meet the needs of jailed students. Regular collaboration can also help address any emerging challenges and ensure the long-term sustainability of educational projects. Communities must actively prioritize the allocation of adequate finances and resources to enhance jail education programs. This entails promoting government and private sector aid to ensure the availability of crucial instructional materials, technical resources, and support services.

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