

Probing Beneath the Iceberg: An Exploration of Factors Attributed to Offenders' School Dropout in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The high rate of offenders' school dropout in South Africa and worldwide stresses the need for in-depth studies to explore its causes. While numerous studies highlight adult and juvenile offenders' exorbitant formal school dropout rate, little has been done to probe beneath this 'dropout iceberg.' This paper sought to explore the factor(s) to which offenders' formal school dropout rate can be attributed. From the interpretivist epistemological stance, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five (5) purposively sampled adult offenders to address the question: What factors cause adult offenders' formal school dropout in South African correctional centre facilities? Framed within the case study research design, the study inferred findings from the thematic approach toward data analysis. Huttler's (2000) wellness model was used as the framework underpinning the study. Emanating from data collected were four prominent yet intertwined factors to which offender formal school dropout could be attributed, i.e., institutional hurdles to offenders' formal school, language barrier as the demoralizing factor for offenders who are not competent in the instructional language, correctional officers' attitudes towards education and unacceptable remarks towards offenders as well as prison situational factors. The researchers recommend using multilingual pedagogies, restructuring the draft transfer policy, and correctional officers' workshops whose central focus is the importance of correctional education in the rehabilitation process.

KEYWORDS

Offender formal education; rehabilitation process; educationists; correctional centre facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Quality education for all is the most critical goal of the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs). Education holds a privileged and central position in achieving SDGs (UNESCO, 2020). Quality education in the UN's SDGs covers every person from all segments of life, including offenders. Offender education is a unilinear mode of education provision that seeks to perfect the offender-rehabilitation process. Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, education in correctional centre facilities has been perceived and documented as a humanistic approach to rehabilitating offenders (Tiwari, 2020). Amongst the plethora of advantages of offender formal education is its discernible positive correction to reduced recidivism rate (Ellison et al., 2017; Mbatha & Mokoena, 2024; Smith, 2024). Furthermore, several other scholars have revealed the association between offender school enrolment, and the development of critical thinking skills (Mbatha & Mokoena, 2024; Mokoela, 2016; Mukeredzi, 2021). In discussing the advantages of offender-formal education, the latter scholars presented and attached different conceptualizations on what constitutes offender-formal education. For example, Mbatha and Mokoena (2024) conceptualize offender formal education as the education system intended to improve inmates' basic, academic, and occupational skills. Mokoela (2016), on the other hand, conceptualizes offender formal education as the constructive utilization of confinement through education, which provides positive support towards post release employment and further training. The point of convergence from the conceptualizations above is arguably the development of offenders during and post-incarceration. However, the discernible common denominator, at least for the latter scholars, is the question of why offender formal education enrolment declines significantly therewithal offenders' performance in summative and formative assessments. Coupling the latter is the concern around the high rate of offenders' innumeracy and illiteracy, particularly in African countries (Adetunji et al., 2015; Khwela, 2015; Ndaba, 2019). The offender school dropout rate, and the significantly high statistics indicating offender illiteracy, particularly in African correctional facilities have been bedeviling scholars for some time. The scholarship whose focus is on probing beneath the offenders' formal schooling dropout rate and illiteracy levels is arguably limited. This paper sought to explore the rationale behind offenders' formal schooling dropout. Animating the present study is the following research question:

- **What factors contribute to adult offenders' formal school dropout in South African correctional center facilities?**

In an attempt to address this research question, the researchers framed the study within the case study research design, with the case of one selected South African correctional centre facility occupying the central focus of the study. The responses of offenders from the semi-structured group were operationalized to address the research question of the study.

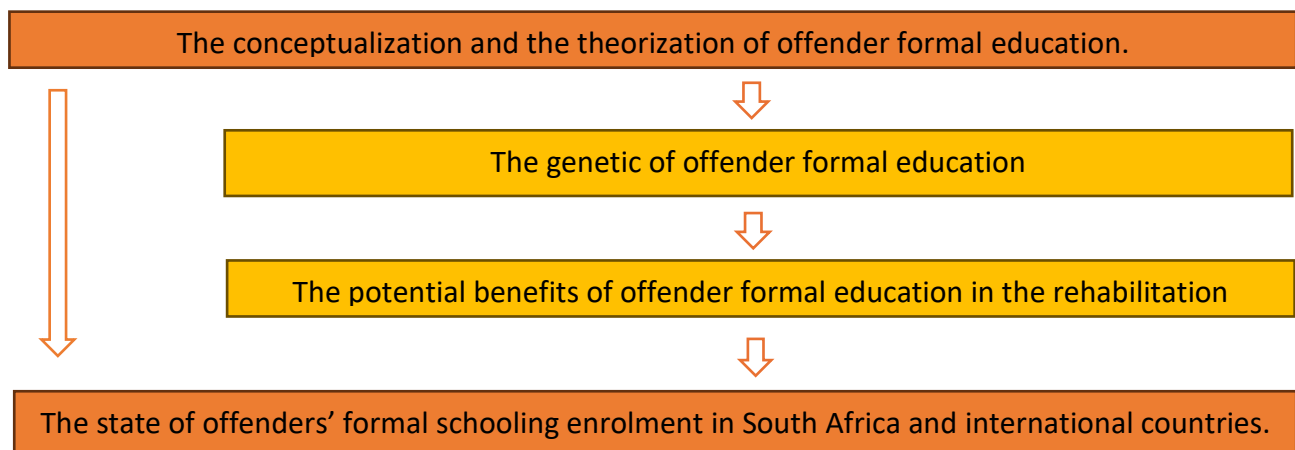
This study's two-fold intent (i.e., divulgence of high offender dropout rate in South Africa and the attempt to probe beneath the bedeviling offender dropout rate behind such) distinguishes the present study from the preceding studies on offender formal education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature, in the context of the present intellectual piece, was arranged as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

The arrangement of the literature review



Conceptualizing and Theorizing Offender Formal Education

Offender formal education has been theorized, conceptualized, and subsequently implemented voluminously by different scholars and education practitioners from the lens of dissimilar contexts. Jovanić (2011), for example, discusses offender formal education as an attempt to broaden inclusive education by infusing evicted persons in the education process. While some scholars have argued against the understanding, and the infusion of offender formal education within the context of inclusive education, Prodanov (2013), and O'Sullivan et al. (2020), argue that the structuring of correctional education programs in a way that caters for offenders' individual needs and deficits analogizes offender formal education to inclusive education. Furthermore, applying the same curriculum and academic standards in teaching individuals within the society and offenders within correctional centre facilities. (Ngozwana, 2017), arguably makes the conceptualization of offender formal education as inclusive education accurate.

From Behan (2014) study that pursued to explore how formal education addresses offenders' adaptive and transformative needs, the conceptualization of offenders' formal education as the tool for facilitating the offenders' transformed attitudes can be drawn. In addition, several other studies perceive offender formal education as the resource operationalized to enhance offenders' behaviour change and to prepare them [offenders] for reintegration into societies (Biswalo, 2011). From these scholarly works, a single perception of and on what offender formal education entails is discernible; and that is, it [offender formal

education] is the curriculum-based correctional intervention, which aims at inducing good social behaviour, transformed attitude, and preparation for societal reintegration.

Different pedagogical and learning approaches are operationalized in the teaching and learning of offenders. For example, Swedish offender formal education is conducted through what is termed “individualized instruction approach” (Ahl, 2020), whereas the United States offenders attain education through inquiry-based learning. In the South African context, multilingual pedagogies are employed to teach offenders subjects like mathematics and science (Mbatha, 2024a, 2024b; Mbatha & Mokoena, 2024; Mdakane et al., 2024). The teaching, learning, and pedagogical approaches employed in correctional centre classrooms initially did not occupy the central focus of the present intellectual piece. However, it [teaching, learning, and pedagogical approaches] can be used to define the high rate of offenders' school dropout, mainly because the scholarship that had ventured to “probe beneath the dropout iceberg” is limited. Before attempting to relate teaching, learning, and pedagogical approaches to offenders' formal school dropout, the birth and the genetics of offender education (based on literature) will be discussed.

The genetic of offender formal education

Introducing and providing formal education to offenders is not a novel concept. Offender education was initially introduced at the first congress of the International Commission on Criminal Justice and Penal Institutions, which was held in 1872 (Fuchs, 2015). Subsequently, the theme of offender formal education dominated three out of twelve congresses organized by the same commission (Glover & Lotze, 1989). In the context of this study, the discussion of and around the birth of offenders' formal education is conceptualized as the hierarchical pyramid, which is still subject to further developments (see Figure 2 below). After the initial discussion of offender formal education, and the proposal that it [offender education] should be diversified, with the training of offenders so that they will be able to earn an honest living in the community occupying the central focus, three other discussions followed (Mokoele, 2016). At present, offender education is arguably an ecology of the aspects presented in Figure 2.

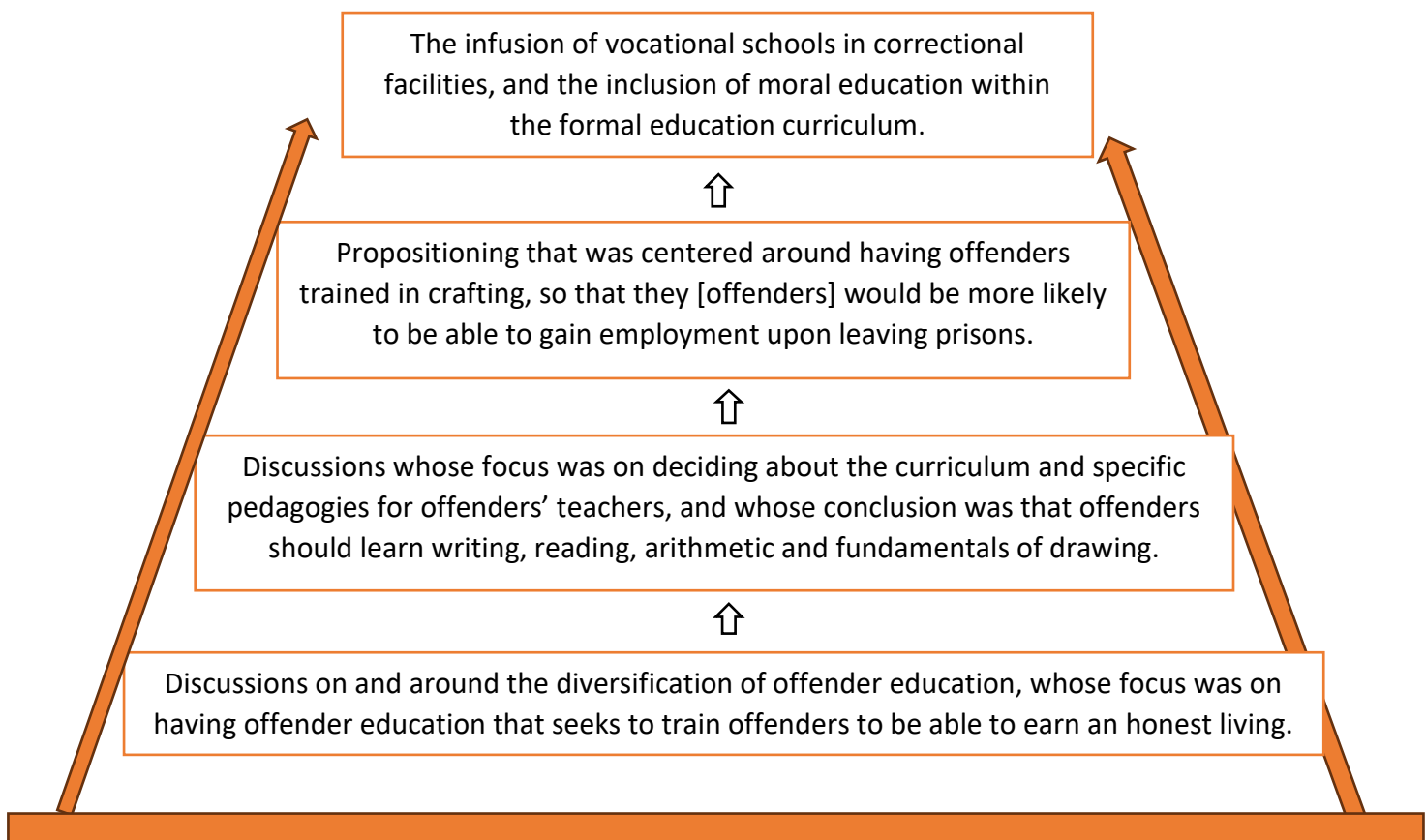
Taking into account the nature of the discussions about curriculum and specific pedagogies for teaching offenders (which dominated the third Congress of International Commission of Justice) and the present South African offender education curriculum structure, which is similar to that which is used in the teaching and training of adults (Vandala, 2019), it can be concluded that, although originating from London, offender education has metastasized to African countries.

While the understanding of the genealogy of offender education, and the spread thereof in African countries is essential, it is equally paramount to note that the question of whether offenders should receive formal education has (and still) provokes polarized debates, amongst which, according to Steele et al. (2016), is the body of opinion that regards any form of educational intervention as being superfluous. On the other hand, a body of opinion advocates for the idea that offender education is an essential component of behavioural correction

(Custer, 2016; Pompoco, 2023; Pompoco et al., 2017). Although discussing the aforementioned is paramount, it is equally important to note that the scholarship-associated offender school dropout rates with each of the debates mentioned above are limited. This makes the question of “what factors contribute to offender school dropout rate” a legitimate inquiry, particularly in the present time where offender education is considered a humanistic approach for and towards offender rehabilitation. Not only is offender education considered a humanistic approach during incarceration, but its benefits extend beyond the parameters of correctional facilities. Subsequent to that is the review of literature on the potential benefits of offender education during, and after the rehabilitation process.

Figure 2.

The organogram of the discussions of offender education from the congresses of the International Commission on Criminal Justice and Penal Institutions



The potential benefits of offender education during and after incarceration

While overstating the need for offenders to attain formal education arguably seems futile, particularly given the rapid changes in the labor market, owing to the ascendance of artificial intelligence and modern technologies, studies continue to advocate for the attainment of offender formal education across all countries in the world. A large-scale assessment called *Locked Up and Locked Out: An Educational Perspective on the U.S. Prison Population* was conducted in the United States to highlight the need for increased education attainment in U.S.

prisons, (Coley & Barton, 2006). Amongst the plethora of benefits of offender formal education, is its role in increasing the offender employment prospects by nearly ten percent, (Oakford et al., 2019). For Oakford et al. (2019), if fifty percent of the eligible prison population participated in a postsecondary education program, employment rates among all formerly incarcerated workers would rise by roughly 2.1 percent during their first year after release.

While the latter secludes the percentage increase in the employment rate of formerly U.S incarcerated workers, the figures can be used to estimate the role of offender formal education in South Africa. Again, it is essential to note that education alone does not guarantee economic prosperity; however, offenders with higher or average levels of education tend to fare better in the labor market, (Carson, 2018). According to Steurer (2020), offender education benefits by safeguarding the realization of three goals central to the rehabilitation process. These goals are: (a) to provide security (b) safety, and (c) rehabilitation for offenders. The researchers, in the present intellectual piece, argue that while the three latter goals seem to be benefiting offenders only within the parameters of correctional centre facilities, they [three goals] are, in fact, beneficial in a two-fold way, that is, in ensuring the safety, security, and rehabilitation within correctional centre facilities, and in ensuring the safety and security of the community at large, particularly after the offenders have been re-integrated into the society. Hassan and Rosly (2021) argue that formal offender education provides offenders with technical and intellectual skills to ensure successful [offender] social reintegration and community safety.

Several studies have related offender education to reduced recidivism rates, (Ellison et al., 2017; Hill, 2015; Magee, 2021). The study by Magee (2021), whose central avenue was on how offender education prevents crime, revealed that offender formal and vocational education decreases crime rates since it allows ex-offenders to escape inactivity and idleness, triggering a re-offending (also see Nordin, 2018). The question of “how does formal education allow ex-offenders to escape inactivity and idleness” was insufficiently addressed in the study. The researchers in the present intellectual piece argue that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are honed through formal education. Honoring these skills motivates hard work, lawful acts, and engagement in activities that elevate the country’s economy. Supplementary to the benefits of offender education indicated above, scholars further outline several other benefits attributed to offenders’ attainment of formal education. Offenders’ positive adjustment, (Hassan & Rosly, 2021), and improved self-esteem, (Gxubane, 2018), are among these. Worth noting is that while offender formal education strikes as an individual activity, its benefits elongate to the well-being of the society at large.

The state of offenders’ formal schooling enrolment in South Africa and international countries

The scholarship whose concentration is on the state of South African offenders’ formal education enrolment is limited. Therefore, researchers used the United States and Belgian scholarship to surmise the state of offenders’ formal education enrolment in the South African context. From the survey data which were collected by Brosens et al. (2019) to establish the state of formal schooling enrolment in the selected remand Belgian prison, the results

demonstrated that about 29% of the offenders were enrolled for taking part in educational courses. This is a much lower rate, antithetical to the high rate of offenders who cannot read, write, or perform skill-specific tasks such as learning computer skills and welding, (Gaes, 2008). The rationale behind the lower rate of formal schooling enrolment in Belgium remains unclear, particularly since several studies have commended the flexibility of prison courses and the adaptation of correctional education to the needs of the offenders, (Hurkmans et al., 2013). Likewise, the adaptation of correctional education to the needs of offenders in Belgium reveals that the rationale behind the lower offender enrolment rate is less on curriculum structure and more on other barriers that are not entirely pedagogical. Scholars such as Bunyan (2020), Hardin et al. (2020), and Majcher et al. (2020) have centralized lower offender school enrolment in Belgium within situational barriers that are related to a person's life situation. While these barriers are legitimate, the question of whether they [situational barriers] can be used to comprehend the problem of offender formal schooling dropout in South Africa remains a worthwhile question. Furthermore, Rivera-Rivera, (1965) indicated that dispositional barriers (e.g., not feeling like taking classes), were prevalent amongst Belgian correctional facilities in the early 1960's. However, given the anciencey of the scholarship, the question of whether dispositional factors can be used to explain offender school dropout rate, particularly since the perspectives on the importance of education in the rehabilitation process have advanced over the years, is legitimate.

Several studies conducted in the United States reveal that many offenders lack basic educational and employment skills even though formal education is considered a prerequisite for the rehabilitation process, (Cho & Tyler, 2013; Harlow, 2003; Harlow et al., 2010). The significantly lower rate of offenders' education attainment is attributed to the handful of factors involving (but not limited to) offenders' school dropout, (Camp et al., 2006). Contrary to the literature, which focused on exploring the rationale behind offender formal school dropout in Belgium, the United States' scholars, in their attempt to define offender school dropout rates, gesture towards institutional barriers. For instance, according to Newton et al. (2018), the correctional education budget (in the U.S.) remains fixed while the number of prisoners increases. This connotes that fewer offenders have access to education, whereas the vast majority are waiting on the list. The correctional education budget has also been raised as the problem amounting to an insufficient distribution of offender education and low offender school enrolment in several other countries, (Muñoz, 2023). While the institutional barriers can presumably be attributed to the lower schooling enrolment for South African offenders, probing beneath this barrier to excavate supplementary contributors to lower offender formal schooling enrolment is worthwhile. The rationale behind offenders' formal school dropout, in researchers' subjective view, is accentuated to a limited extent, thus revealing the need to further probe beneath this "dropout" iceberg. In the process of probing beneath the dropout iceberg, the researchers engaged in the quest to address the question, "To what factors can adult offenders' formal school dropout in South African correctional centre facilities be attributed?"

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The study is theoretically underpinned by the wellness model developed by Bill Huttler in 1970. For Nkomo (2015), the realization of individual wellness is based on six dimensions: emotional, academic, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual. Even though discussed and conceptualized discretely, the six dimensions of the wellness model are interrelated and intertwined, with the feebleness in one dimension adversely affecting the holistic wellness of an individual, and the iteration of one dimension enhancing individual wellness. Deliberated below is each of the six dimensions. In the context of the present intellectual piece, researchers must note that researchers conceptualize wellness as the completion of the rehabilitation process cemented on offenders' participation in different rehabilitation activities offered by the South African Department of Correctional Services.

Emotional wellness focuses on developing self-esteem, self-control, and determination. The researchers argue that offenders develop this dimension through participation in programs offered with the Development and Care Component. Those programs include formal and vocational education, social work, and spiritual care services.

Academic dimension: This dimension entails the stimulation of mental activity and creativity. For the context of this study, this dimension is developed solely through formal and vocational education for offenders.

Occupational dimension: This dimension iterates that people's lives are enriched through satisfaction at work, and thus, capacitating them about careers, skills, and career choices is paramount. This dimension is developed through offender formal and vocational education, engaging in correctional facility-based voluntary and ex-offender community service.

Physical dimension: This dimension considers the benefits of regular physical exercise and healthy food consumption. The researchers argue that this dimension is realized through offender nutrition and recreation activities.

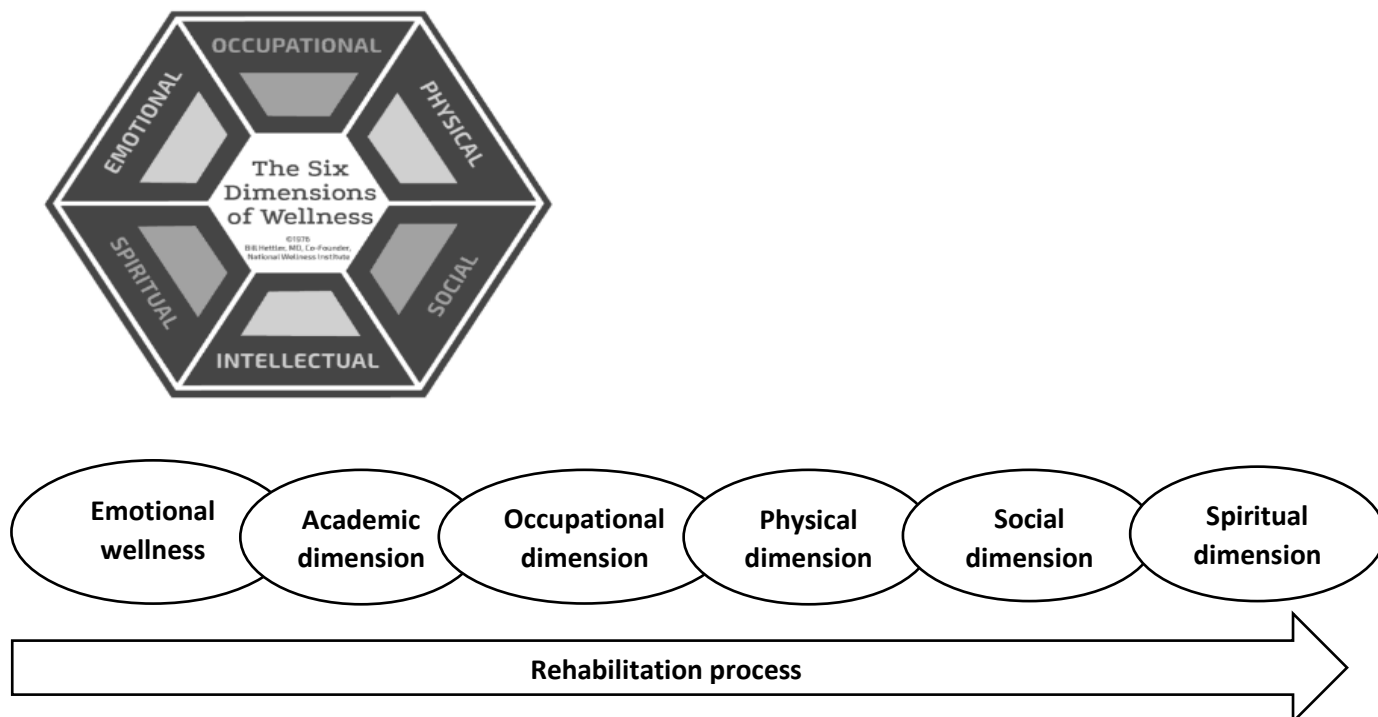
Social dimension: This dimension focuses on the contribution of one to one's environment and community. In the context of the present intellectual piece, this dimension is developed through community service and victim-offender dialogues.

Spiritual dimension: It entails the search for meaning and purpose in existence through the development of belief systems and values and the creation of a worldview. The spiritual care, under the Development and Care component, arguably seeks to (in one way or the other) develop this dimension for offenders.

The dimensions of the wellness model served as the lens in the present study, enabling researchers to analyze and comprehend the rehabilitation process as the product of intertwined rehabilitation processes. Likewise, the researchers used the model to establish how the imperfection of one of the six dimensions results in offender formal school dropout. Researchers subscribe to the view that the causes of offender school dropout are not solely institutional, but they are disgorged by the plethora of other different factors, which are not entirely pedagogical.

Figure 3.

The interlink between the dimensions of wellness.



Huttler's model was used as a lens for and towards the analysis of data, which sought to address the research question that animated the present intellectual piece. It is paramount to further discuss the context within which the study that sought to address the research question focused on. Deliberated in the subsequent subtopic is the context that occupied the central focus of the study.

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

The study was contextualized within one correctional centre in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Five (5) adult offenders who had dropped out of formal schooling programs in the selected correctional facility were sampled purposively. From the findings of the study, the researchers inferred factors that contribute to offender formal school dropout. Delimiting the study was the researchers' focus on one correctional facility. While offender formal schooling dropout is a national and global problem, it is believed that the findings would have revealed the overabundance of factors to which the latter is attributed should the study have been contextualized in different South African correctional facilities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to evaluate, from the interpretivist epistemological stance, through the lens of Huttler's wellness model, the factors contributing to offender formal schooling dropout rate. Framed within the case study research design, the study explored the case of one selected correctional facility in-depth. Five adult offenders, who had dropped out of formal schooling programs offered within the selected correctional facility, were purposively sampled. The

selected participants had not received formal education before incarceration and hence required at least an Adult Education and Training (AET) level four certificate (which is equivalent to NQF level 1) to be eligible for parole. Furthermore, the selected participants were twenty-one (21) years and older because formal education is mandatory for juvenile offenders, and the accessible literature indicates a sharp decline in formal schooling enrolment for offenders aged twenty-one years and older.

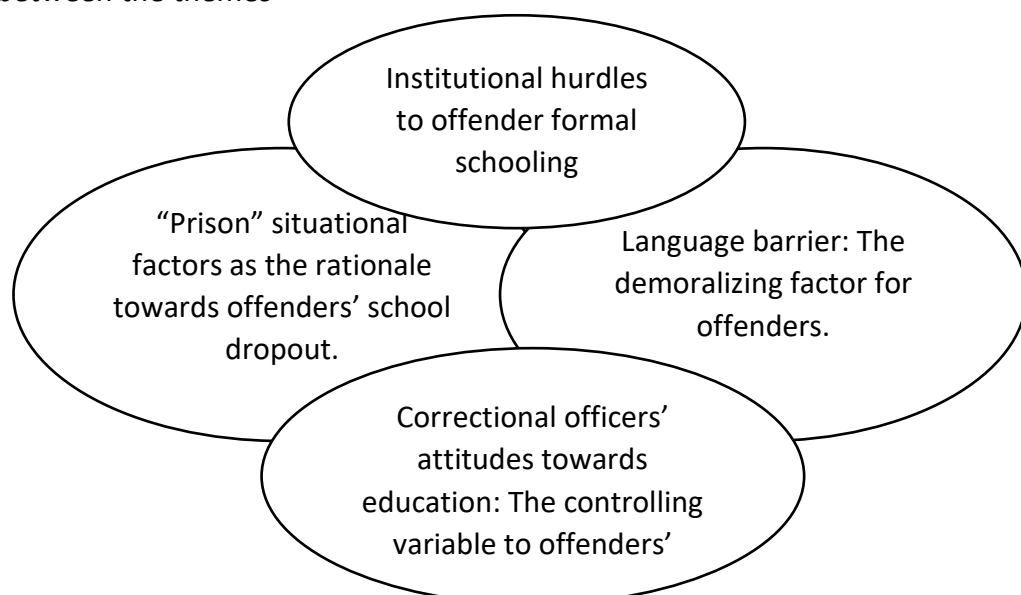
Qualitative Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. They (data) were transcribed, carefully sifted and subsequently analysed thematically by data coding, observation of patterns within the coded data, and finally by creating the themes based on data pattern(s). The themes that emerged sought to address the question: **What factors contribute to adult offenders' formal school dropout in South African correctional centre facilities?** These themes were then used as findings in the discussion and presentation of the results. Prior to the collection of data, researchers requested to record the proceedings using a tape recorder. Permission to record semi-structured interviews was attained from participants. Researchers applied for and received the ethical clearance certificate from the institution of their affiliation. Furthermore, permission to conduct the study was granted by the National Department of Correctional Services. As a means towards ensuring the validity of data, data collection instruments and processes were made readily available and open for inspection.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

After the analysis of data, findings that were inferred were summarized according to four (4) themes. The four themes, even though discussed discretely, are intertwined and interrelated, especially since each one of them sought to address the research question that animates the study (the interlink between the four themes is presented in the diagram in Figure 4 below).

Figure 4.

The interlink between the themes



Institutional hurdles to offender formal schooling

Scholarship has centralized institutional barriers and hurdles in discussions whose focus is on declined offender participation in formal education programs. For example, Newton et al., (2018), have related institutional barriers to offenders' non-engagement in formal education programs in the United States. Furthermore, several other scholars have discussed the failure of the prison authorities and education organizers to respond to offenders' requests to enroll in correctional education, (Westrheim & Manger, 2014), and a too-limited offender education curriculum, (Craft et al., 2019), as one amongst the plethora of factors to which offenders' school dropout and hesitance to participate in formal education programs can be attributed in Western countries. The bedeviling question of whether the institutional hurdles translate satisfactorily to the South African correctional education context was addressed in the present study. **Adult offenders A and B**, for instance, indicated that, although they were willing and eager to continue attending formal schooling, the correctional facility could not respond to their request to be retained in the same correctional facility until they attained their Adult Education and Training (AET) level four qualification. The words of **adult offender A** are cited verbatim below:

As much as I liked going to school and getting an education, I had to drop out of school in the middle of the year because of the draft [the system of transferring offenders from one correctional facility to another]. With the draft, the fathers [correctional officers] do not negotiate with you. I tried to explain that I am doing AET level three, and I am only left with one year. The fathers told me that transferring offenders is an institutional policy. Ever since I came to this correctional facility, I got demotivated to re-enroll and continue with my studies. My worry is, what if I get transferred again?

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

Adult offender B

The decision to transfer us to other correctional facilities is not dependent on whether we are attending formal schooling or not. For example, in my case, I got a draft when I was in the middle of the AET level four mid-year exams. I had to forget about re-enrolling in the new correctional facility. Even to date, I am not eager to attend any kind of formal schooling, because we always get transferred, and the decision is non-negotiable.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

From Huttler's wellness model, the transfer of offenders from one correctional facility to another can be conceptualized as an approach to enhancing the social dimension. According to Mujuzi (2014), offenders are transferred with the intent to bring them closer to their families and to enable them to maintain relationships and social interaction with their relatives while they are incarcerated. Again, sections 13 and 43 of the Correctional Services Act state that the Department of Correctional Services must encourage sentenced offenders to maintain contact with the community and enable them to stay abreast of current affairs. However, if the transfer of offenders is not implemented owing to the latter reasons, the intended development of the

social dimension adversely affects offenders' right to education and causes offenders to drop out of school. Since the wellness dimensions are intertwined (as discussed earlier), the improper implementation of a single dimension negatively affects the other dimension. In this context, the improper development of the social dimension affects the academic and emotional wellness dimension.

Amongst the institutional hurdles to offender education is a "too limited offender education curriculum." The concern around the curriculum structure followed in offender education programs is not eccentric in the South African context. Mbatha and Mokoena (2024), Mbatha (2024a), and Mbatha (2024b), for example, argue that the mathematics content taught to offenders focuses much on procedural fluency and factual knowledge aspects and overlooks conceptual and practical aspects. **Adult offender B** indicated that amongst the rationale behind his dropping out of school was the "irrelevance and impracticality of learning" to his life during and after incarceration. His words are cited verbatim below:

Besides the issue of draft transfers, the curriculum that is followed here [in the teaching and learning that takes place within correctional facilities] is, in my view, very limiting. The focus is only on theory. I ended up not seeing the relevance and the importance of education both here in prison and outside [after incarceration]. Hence, I dropped out of school and opted for ¹izipani.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

Adult offender C concurred with the sentiments of Adult Offender B by revealing the "dichotomy" between formal schooling and real-life situations. His words are cited verbatim below:

For me, there is a serious "dichotomy" between the formal schooling curriculum and real-life situations. You end up failing to co-ordinate that which is learnt in school, and the real-life problems. For example, we learn Small Medium and Micro Interprise as one of the learning areas in AET level four. However, given the nature of the South African economy, how will one be able to get the "start-up" capital for a business after incarceration?

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

For **Adult Offenders B** and **C**, the formal education curriculum used to teach offenders is limited and dichotomized from offenders' real lives. For this reason, the offenders drop out of school. The scholarship that outlines the importance of offender education does not exclude its role in empowering offenders with the skills usable for the world of skilled trade. For example, Bouffard et al. (2000), argue that offender formal education and vocational education programs are intended to counteract the effects of poor educational achievement and lowered employability commonly found among correctional populations. However, this study revealed that even though the benefits of offender education are articulated in scholarly literature, the

¹ *Izipani refers to temporary employment offenders to offenders. Offenders are employed either as cleaners, cow milkers, or farmers and paid the salary that ranges from R20,00 to R250 per month.

curriculum is not structured as such. Hence, offenders drop out of school and opt for other opportunities that will aid them in making a living during and post-incarceration.

Language barrier: The demoralizing factor for offenders.

The expansion of multilingualism and the status quo attached to the language of English has given rise to many language-based problems and thus transformed the perception of language as a resource to language as a problem. The issues of language and language use have been the centre of polarized debate in basic and higher education spaces. Several scholars have discussed Ruiz's 2010 framework of language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource in their attempt to negotiate multilingual pedagogies within teaching and learning spaces, (Mbatha, 2024a; Zondi & Mbatha, 2021). The discussions of multilingual pedagogies are arguably relevant in adult correctional education, mainly because multilingualism is ubiquitous. The question that has remained unaddressed is whether the "problematicity" of language translates to and explains the formal schooling dropout in correctional centre facilities. The study discovered that adult offenders drop out of school because they struggle to comprehend the content delivered in a language that is not their own. Furthermore, it was revealed that owing to the failure to utilize linguistic resources and repertoires in a language that is not their own, they [adult offenders] get demotivated to further their formal schooling programs until completion. Cited verbatim below are the words of **adult offender C**, whose content gestures toward language being the barrier in the learning process.

I could not understand English. I never had formal schooling before, so the only language I understand is isiZulu. Mathematics and other subjects are taught in English; therefore, I could not understand anything. The only subject I understood was isiZulu. I deemed it meaningless to study only to pass isiZulu only. I then dropped out of school.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

Adult offender B also shared a similar sentiment. His words are cited verbatim below:

My pre-incarceration level of education goes as far as second year [grade two]. I neither know nor understand English. When I got incarcerated, I got really surprised to learn that I will be taught and assessed in English. The funny thing is that, for the whole three hours, I could not understand even a single word. What is the point really, of going to school only to get lost in the language used.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

From the words of **adult offenders B** and **C**, the language became both the learning barrier and the causal factor for dropping out of school. What can be drawn from the words of adult offenders is that, for subjects that entail multifarious languages, those languages are likely to hinder learning and cause formal school dropout. Mathematics, for example, entails multifarious languages, i.e., the Language through which mathematics is taught, the mathematics register, and the learners' home language, (Phakeng, 2016). The researchers argue, therefore, that there is a need to negotiate and foster multilingual pedagogies (i.e., translanguaging, translation, code-switching, and code-mixing), particularly in correctional

centre classrooms, to subvert offender school dropout, and to elevate the comprehension of subject contents.

Correctional officers' attitude towards education: The controlling variable to offenders' school dropout.

The study discovered that correctional officers responsible for initiating and ensuring the movement of offenders within the different areas of the correctional centre facility have negative attitude towards offender formal education. This negative attitude causes them [correctional officers] to demotivate offenders from continuing with formal schooling. While the justification of this negative attitude towards education was not quite discernible (mainly since the exploration of correctional officers' attitudes towards offender education was not the central focus of the study), it was apparent that it [negative attitude towards offender formal education] is fueled through the prioritization of other programs (within the correctional centre facility) over formal education. Furthermore, coupling this negative attitude towards offender formal education are utterances that denigrate the value of offender formal education (see the verbatim words of **adult offenders D** and **C** below).

Adult offender C

*Obaba are refusing to take us to school. Sometimes, you find that no correctional offender is assigned to take us to school. Here, you don't just move around, you have to be escorted at all times. If no one can escort you, there is nothing you can do. In fact, even if you ask to be escorted to school, obaba will just tell you that "education will not benefit you,"; "You failed to get an education while you still had sufficient time outside," "You preferred to have s**x with minors instead of going to school before incarceration" and all those demotivating remarks. Hence, I decided to quit school, especially if going to school would constantly remind me of my failure and what offenses I committed...*

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

Adult offender D

Formal schooling programs are not taken seriously from the side of correctional officers. What is more important to them is to get offenders to perform other duties such as milking cows and driving tractors for farm correctional facilities. I do not know the rationale behind this, but once you make mention of formal education, you get all sorts of demotivating remarks.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

The words cited verbatim above indicate that adult offenders' movement is limited, and because correctional officers are skeptical about moving them to education facilities, offenders drop out of school. Furthermore, it is indicated that correctional officers have negative attitudes not only towards formal education but also towards offenders because they remind them of how incapable they are of learning and how their previous offenses validate their incapability and unfitness to attend formal education. It is further indicated that other programs are prioritized over formal schooling. According to Bello and Matshaba (2022), it is these negative

attitudes from correctional officers that influence offenders (both juvenile and adult) to have adverse perceptions about themselves and correctional officers.

From the lens of Huttler's wellness model, it can be argued that attitude (both positive and negative) can either amplify or mar specific wellness dimensions. For instance, correctional officers' attitude towards learning mar adult offenders' academic and emotional dimensions because not only do they get demotivated to continue with formal schooling, but their self-esteem and confidence, in general, get lowered.

"Prison" situational factors as the rationale towards offenders' school dropout

Correctional facilities are distinct contexts characterized by various factors, which are predominantly social and situational. For example, the rife of gangsterism, violence, and drug abuse has been a concern arising from scholarship, whose focus is on South African offender rehabilitation and correctional facilities, (Muntingh, 2010). This study discovered that "prison" situational factors contribute to the school dropout of adult offenders. For example, **adult offender E** indicated that, at some point, there was warfare between two gang groups, and the correctional facility had to be locked down, with no movements allowed out of sections. This lockdown, according to **adult offender E**, caused him to drop out of school because he felt he had lost on a lot of activities and examinations. From then on, this adult offender has never re-enrolled in formal schooling.

It happened at some point that some of our² brothers had some altercation with the³ 28's. The "prison" was shut down completely, and we were not allowed to move out of sections. That took about three to four months. I was doing AET level two at that time, and I had to drop out of school because I had lost on some examinations and assessments. From then, I never considered going back to school again.

(The words, presented verbatim above, were translated from isiZulu language)

If the words of this adult offender were to be analyzed through the lens of Huttler's model, it could be concluded that situational factors have an impact (which can be positive or negative, depending on the nature of the situational factor) on one or many dimensions of wellness. For the context of this study, the warfare between the two gang members affected the rehabilitation processes of offenders because they were not allowed to go out of sections and attend rehabilitation programs that were outside of the Corrections and Security component (i.e., Development and Care). Again, the warfare affected the academic and social well-being of adult offenders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper sought to explore the factors that are contributory to adult offenders' formal school dropouts in South African correctional centre facilities. Emanating from the study were the

² Brothers, in this context, denotes the group of adult offenders who are affiliated with the same gang.

³ 28's and 26's are two prevalent gang groups, that often resonate with polarized beliefs, and hence always in disagreement.

findings that revealed that offenders drop out of school because of institutional hurdles and because of Correctional officers' negative attitude towards offenders' formal education. Again, demoralizing offenders from continued participation in offender formal education programs is the language through which the content is taught, which, for most offenders, is a non-native language prison situational factor as the causal factor for offender formal school dropout. The paper concludes by designating discouragement to participate in formal education programs, which springs from each of the four themes discussed in the data presentation and analysis section. Recommended as the remedial strategy to the problem outlined in the present intellectual piece is the use of multilingual pedagogies, restructuring of the draft transfer policy, and correctional officers' workshops whose central focus can be on the importance of correctional education in the rehabilitation process.

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