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# Why prisoners pursue adult education and training: Perceptions of prison instructors

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## ABSTRACT

This study reports on a cross-sectional survey of prison instructors (educators and managers) in adult education and training centres in five South African prisons. The study attempted to understand their perceptions of what motivates prisoners to pursue further education. The research draws on Vroom's Expectancy Motivation Theory, which holds that behaviour is a result of deliberate choices from among alternatives in order to maximise pleasure and reduce pain. The semi-structured interviews conducted with ten prison managers and 11 educators revealed instrumentality motivation coupled with expectancy and valency motivation reflected in three major findings: first, that prisoners pursue adult education to improve themselves educationally and prepare for employment after their release; second, that prisoners seek to prevent a relapse into criminal activity and re-imprisonment and to prepare for a crime-free life; and, third, that learning takes their minds off their incarceration and kills time. These findings have direct implications for policy and practice as they suggest a need to support the fight against recidivism.

## KEYWORDS

*Protected spaces, Adult Education and Training (AET), South African prisoner motivations*

## **Introduction and background**

This study is based on a national cross-sectional survey of Adult Education and Training (AET) centres carried out by a higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal. The national survey was funded by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the European Union (EU) through the Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme.

The survey investigated the perceptions of instructors in private, public and protected spaces (e.g. AET centres in prisons) in order to understand the courses offered; centre enrolments; educator numbers, qualifications, training needs and salaries; challenges centres face; and motivations for learner engagement in courses (Land, Mbamali & Mukeredzi, 2021).

The data for this article were drawn from those generated for the national survey and they are based on five AET centres in prisons in order to explore the perceptions of prison instructors (referred to as ‘managers’ and ‘educators’) about prisoners’ motivations to learn.

The voices of the prisoners themselves are noticeably completely absent in this article, which is a limitation. However, this is due to the survey’s terms of reference which required them to interact with managers and educators only, and not with inmates or learners. The article terms prisons or correctional centres as ‘protected spaces’ because these places are in essence protected, given the restrictive entry measures enforced for the security of the public, other prisoners and staff. It is the AET centres in these prisons that are targeted in this article.

In developing countries such as South Africa, research on adult education appears limited, particularly that on offenders pursuing adult education during incarceration. MacDonald (2018) compares extensive research in other education sectors with studies in adult education and laments the dire need for research in AET. Dean (2011) also bemoans the inadequate and ill-researched AET educators in South Africa, indicating that research on educator knowledge and skills is neglected. In addition, research on prisons in South Africa (see Ngabonziza, & Singh, 2012; Ndebele, 2013; Lindegaard & Gear, 2014; Mokoele, 2016; Nel, 2017; Masutha, 2018; Vuk & Dolezal, 2019) has tended to focus, among other factors, on such issues as reduction of recidivism; prison population; prisoner education levels; reintegration; prison gangsterism, idleness and misconduct; and violent acts and victimisation in prisons.

Prisoners’ motivations for embarking on AET programmes have not been investigated, therefore the objective of this study was to understand, from the perceptions of managers and educators, what offenders’ motivations might be for engaging in AET courses.

## **Literature review**

Key and May (2019:15) point out that ‘when prisoners enrol in classes, they are participating in a discourse that produces them as scholars not inmates, learners instead of threats, people

instead of numbers', which may contribute to good prison discipline. According to Chigunwe (2016), a Zimbabwean study shows that discipline developed through prison education during incarceration is carried through to their societies and into employment upon their release. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2015) indicates that providing diverse, constructive educational activities for prisoners is pivotal to the dynamic security of prisons. Dynamic security encompasses both physical and procedural security arrangements that allow prisoners to feel comfortable approaching prison staff before problems escalate. Therefore, if prisoners are fully and productively engaged in constructive educational activities as an essential component of their sentence plans, the prison is likely to be safer and more secure for everyone.

The South African Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS) contends further that education plays a major role in reducing violence and maintaining order, leading to a safer environment (JICS, 2016). Therefore, channelling prisoners' energies into positive activities becomes an essential element of dynamic security principles. To this end, all prisoners should be exposed to opportunities to develop themselves personally in education and/or job skills, inclusive of opportunities to deal with aspects of their psychosocial makeup which may have given rise to criminal activity (UNODC, 2015). Therefore, AET programmes may both improve security outcomes in correctional centres and contribute to the 'dynamic security' mediated by human factors.

Ngabonziza and Singh (2012) and Vandala (2019) concur that the profile of South African incarcerated people reflects poverty, illiteracy and social inadequacy according to social standards. Therefore, prison AET may be a tool for improving their level of education and enhancing their chances of employment and/or furthering their studies. This may eventually create future opportunities that build positive attitudes towards becoming productive members of society. In addition, education in protected spaces can make significant contributions to individual well-being, citizenship and social cohesion (Vandala, 2019).

Generally, the overarching motivation for prisoner education is to reduce offending behaviour – to help offenders to cease engaging in crime. But offender motivations for engaging in learning during incarceration are apparently still being debated (Vandala, 2019). There seem to be mixed perspectives on this aspect: for instance, in the United States, some scholars emphasise motivation related to a reduction in recidivism rates (Koo, 2015). In contrast, extensive speculation has it that inmates' motivation for correctional education is to enhance their education and facilitate their transformation into law-abiding and economically productive citizens, reducing recidivism rates as a result.

Key and May (2019:48–49) conclude that, on entering prison, inmates generally go through a process which Goffman has called 'mortification of the self', where they are

... shaped and coded into an object to be fed into the institutional machinery. ... ground down into lowly and homogenized status of inmate. ... refashioned in state-issued

clothing and relegated to small living space shared by individuals of unknown history and status (Kay & May, 2019:48–49).

In other words, by cutting prisoners off from their loved ones and taking them out of their comfort zones, turning them into uniformed forces, forcing them into complacency and compliance, sharing a small space with people unknown to them, governments generally, and prison systems in particular, send out signals that prisoners no longer matter. On the contrary, protected-space classrooms convey opposite messages. Accepting inmates as students, artisans or tradesmen nourishes them by maintaining the ‘Scholar’ and ‘Work’ identities which provide alternatives to the dominant hegemony (Johnson, 2015; Key & May, 2019). This therefore suggests that prison education is far more than a tool for reducing crime.

Behan (2014) sets out four major motivations for prisoners’ participation in educational programmes in protected spaces, one of which is that participating in educational programmes during imprisonment enables prisoners to use their time constructively while preparing for a productive life subsequent to their release. Behan’s findings are consistent with South African studies: Bender (2018) and Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) concluded that learning helps to reduce recidivism if inmates are engaged in educational programmes in protected correctional spaces. These authors add that high rates of recidivism, which are approximately 95% in South Africa, lead to astronomical correctional costs. With the introduction of prison AET and other education programmes in South Africa, previous offenders may have an estimated 43% lower rate of returning to prison (Mokoele, 2016). Moreover, education programmes may develop the inmates and ‘guarantee far-reaching implications for employment opportunities available for formerly incarcerated people, re-integrating them within society on release’ (Mokoele, 2016:88). This motivation relates to another study of South African prisons by Johnson (2015), who concluded that educational programmes offered by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) should be needs-based and aligned to employment opportunities, self-esteem and the proper rehabilitation of individual offenders.

In this regard, Davis (2017:76) indicates that every USD1 million invested in different approaches to incarceration prohibits 350 crimes whereas similar investment in prison education prevents 600 crimes. Educating offenders is consequently the single most effective crime-prevention strategy (Ewert & Wildhagen, 2011; Bhuller, Dahl, Løken & Mogstad, 2019). Supporting these views, Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) argue that education in protected spaces is a cost-effective means of crime reduction which also offers long-term gains across populations as ex-prisoners have better chances of employment. Long sentences may offer immediate benefits and short-term solutions, but offenders may emerge out of protected spaces with little or no hope of reintegration into their families and communities – upon re-entry into communities, they become time-warped, generally being unskilled and uneducated (Davis, 2017).

Generally, formerly incarcerated, poorly educated individuals often find themselves without any financial resources or social support structures following their release; they therefore

become more susceptible to relapsing into committing crime than to becoming reintegrated into families and communities (Ndebele, 2013; Davis, 2017; Vuk & Dolezal, 2019). Consequently, they find their way back into prison following a few years of release. In contrast, employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals who engage in prison education programmes are often enhanced and re-entry into their families and communities is rendered smoother and generally more successful if they took classes in prison, as employment is one of the pivotal features for successful reintegration.

The second motivation, according to Behan (2014), relates to adopting learning as a coping strategy and a way of killing time while enhancing their endurance of life in the protected space. Coping generally involves processes and efforts to modify and/or alleviate responses or reactions to the effects of stress, which can be either behavioural or psychological.

The third finding was that engagement in prison studies takes inmates' minds off being in incarceration (Behan, 2014:24) with one prisoner quoted as saying that '[studying] made prison life more bearable, a lot more bearable'.

Fourth, studying offers inmates a welcome escape or break from protected space routines and helps them to adapt to their surroundings and way of life. Johnson (2015) adds that there are also beneficial prison arts programmes – poetry, writing, theatre and visual arts – that provide a gateway to further learning and serve to build confidence and self-esteem in prisoners. This is so because such education can give people a voice, open up doors to a better future and restore individuals' self-esteem and social competence.

Furthermore, while a prison education generally has the far-reaching potential to reduce recidivism, the benefits accrue not only after a prisoner's release. To those serving long sentences, education in protected spaces also offers the possibility of significant and life-changing gains. Often there is a profound reduction in gangsterism, violence and disciplinary infringements among prisoners who participate in prison education programmes. Lindegaard and Gear (2014) revealed the prevalence of violent acts among South African inmates associated with prison gangs. Gangs have apparently been viewed as a chief source of criminal acts and other acts of non-compliance inside protected spaces. Such misconduct in protected spaces has been explained as a consequence of high concentrations of lower-educated men with a criminal history (Lindegaard & Gear, 2014; Nel, 2017).

Davis (2017) found that incarcerated prisoners participating in prison education committed 75% fewer infractions than inmates who did not. In addition, Mokele (2016) and Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) concur that prison education disrupted racial and ethnic disagreements and barriers that often instigated prison tensions and violence in South African prisons. Such disruptions also foster appropriate relationships between prison staff and the incarcerated and radically promote inmates' self-image and confidence.

Drawing on Ndebele's study (2013), post-secondary prison education may positively influence prisoners' children and siblings, and strengthen the chances of breaking down intergenerational inequality and disrupting incarceration cycles. For some inmates, participation in education programmes may be viewed as a way of getting away from the prison regime and routines.

Key and May (2019) point out that some prisoners participate in AET in protected spaces as a process of transformation. When one enters prison, there is time to reflect on the past, the present and the future (Behan, 2014). Quoting one inmate, Behan (2014:24) said:

... learning here is a significant part of a process of change, and of making good. It is an opportunity, one of the few ways I can think and try to make amends to society, to my victims. Yes, it is one of the few ways to make amends, some form of amends.

Therefore, learning becomes a transformative experience for the inmate through reflection, where transformation includes personality changes, changes in the organisation of the self, and simultaneous restructuring of individual mental schemes and patterns (Illeris, 2009).

South Africa has the largest prison population in Africa, with approximately 160 000 prisoners, and in this respect, it occupies position nine in the world (Ndebele, 2013; Keehn & Nevin, 2018). The country ranks 40th in the world for the rate of incarceration at 280 per 100 000 people; in addition, remand detainees make up 25.8% of the population (Keehn & Nevin, 2018). Of the 161 054 prisoners in 2016, only 11 649 were engaged in AET programmes (Mokoele, 2016). However, the motivations for such engagement were not known. South Africa's DCS offers both formal and non-formal courses encompassing AET, general education, further education and training, higher education and training, and computer-based learning (DCS, 2010). Also included are vocational and production courses that lead to accredited and certificated programmes that are intended to enhance prisoners' chances of finding employment when they re-join their communities and also reduce the stigma attached to having been an offender (Johnson, 2015). According to Johnson (2015), the DCS requires all adult inmates without a qualification at a Grade 9 equivalent to enrol for AET levels 1 to 4. Similarly, in the United States, Koo (2015) confirms that if at the time of incarceration inmates do not have a General Education Diploma (GED) (equivalent to Grade 9), they are required to enrol in adult basic education or for the GED. Astray-Caneda, Busbee and Fanning (2011) note that the most widely offered prison education classes are in Adult Education, Vocational Education and GED as experts consider these courses to have the greatest potential for yielding positive results. In this regard, the South African DCS emphasises the provision of AET, literacy classes and basic schooling as priorities for inmates (DCS, 2010).

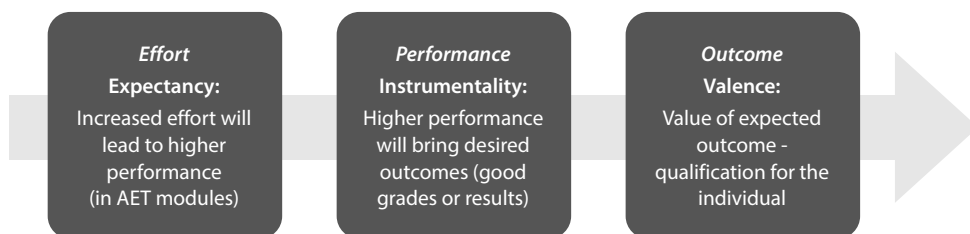
From the literature discussed above, studies on prison education have been carried out in South Africa and elsewhere (see Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012; Behan, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Koo, 2015; Mokoele, 2016; Key & May, 2019), but these studies did not specifically investigate prisoner motivations for pursuing adult education during incarceration.

## **Theoretical framework**

This article draws on Vroom's Expectancy Motivation Theory (Vroom, 1964), which suggests that a person's perception of an outcome will determine his/her level of motivation. This explains why individuals choose one behavioural act over another. Vroom argues that motivation in Expectancy Theory emanated from multiple functions of valence, instrumentality and expectancy (VIE), which are illustrated in Figure 1 and explained below.

### *Expectancy*

As shown in Figure 1, expectancy relates to the belief that more or increased effort in a task will yield better performance: in short, working harder produces something better. In the context of this study, increased effort while participating in course modules will yield better performance.



**Figure 1:** Vroom's Expectancy Theory (adapted from Vroom, 1964)

Therefore, expectancy motivation is an individual's momentary or short-lived belief which may be followed by a particular outcome or the certainty that an individual may feel that they can achieve (Vroom, 1964). Badubi (2017) concurs that belief and performance are influenced by support, resources, information and previous experience as well as confidence in the learner's capacities to bring skills to bear and influence outcomes (self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control). Such factors are also effective in leading to success in adult learning and contribute to their expectancy towards success.

### *Instrumentality*

Vroom (1964) defines instrumentality as the perception that better performance yields a valued outcome. According to Vroom, instrumentality is fostered by being clear on the

relationship between performance and outcomes, trust and respect for decision-makers, including transparency in the processes. In other words, instrumentality motivation is about an individual's perception of the likelihood that good performance will lead to a specific outcome or outcomes. It relates to individual beliefs or expectations that behaving in a certain way brings certain things about (Vroom, 1964).

### *Valence*

According to Vroom (1964), valence means the value attached to or a belief in the desirability of the outcome. It is about the importance a person places on an expected outcome. In other words, this is about rewards. Valence motivation relates to affective orientations to particular outcomes and incentives.

In this study, Vroom's Expectancy Motivation Theory was used as a lens to interpret the data and to explain the findings.

## **Methodology**

In this qualitative study, convenience sampling enabled the selection of available and accessible prison AET centres. The Institutional Research and Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance for the survey, whereafter the researchers sought consent from the National Head of all AET centres, including the head of protected spaces, the DHET and the centre managers. All the participants signed a consent form after being given a clear and detailed explanation of the study and what they were expected to do. Fieldwork took place between February 2018 and January 2020.

Data were generated from the five prisons through semi-structured interviews with ten centre managers and their deputy managers. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were held in prison AET centres. The centre managers' data were complemented with the written narratives of 11 educators across the prisons. Educators' written narratives were generated during a residential learning session at the university in January 2020. Both managers and educators responded to the same questions that enquired about prisoner motivations for participating in AET programmes. Audio-recorded educator narratives were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was accomplished through open coding. Using a non-participant colleague to check the dataset enhanced the trustworthiness of the data.

Each transcript was scrutinised for appropriate responses that depicted themes, enabling provinces, managers and educators to be represented suitably. Extracts from the data substantiated participants' stories of their perceptions of prisoner motivations for participating in AET programmes. Respondents were anonymised in the findings in order to protect confidentiality.



## Findings and discussion

The study investigated perceptions of centre managers and educators with regard to inmates' motivations for engaging in AET. Prisoner motivations for participating in AET programmes emerged in three broad categories:

- improvement of education and preparation for employment;
- prevention of relapse into criminal activity and preparation for crime-free life; and
- taking the mind off incarceration and killing time.

In applying Vroom's theorisation (1964) as depicted in Table 1, it appears that while instrumentality was the most popular, expectancy and valency were also key, given that the improvement of educational level through AET was in preparation for employment, to prevent re-imprisonment and to prepare for a crime-free life. This is consistent with Vroom (1964), who points out that motivation occurs when three specific conditions – effort, performance and outcome – are met. In this case, motivation represents a chain where each link is a condition, and the intersection of each link represents the component's expectancy, instrumentality and valence. In the chain, an individual *expects* their effort to yield some level of performance (expectancy). The expected outcome of their performance is considered *instrumental* to the outcome (instrumentality). Finally, an individual places subjective *value* on their perception of the outcome (valence). This value therefore determines how satisfactory the outcome is to them. The following sections illustrate the findings on motivations in relation to VIE theorisation.

### To improve education level and prepare for employment

All the participants perceived that inmates were pushed/pulled by VIE, which influenced their behavioural acts – to join AET programmes. The participants perceived that inmates wanted to improve their education levels and make up for learning missed before their incarceration. Drawing on Vroom's Expectancy Motivation Theory (Vroom, 1964; Guntoro & Fongmul, 2016), this reflected inmates' momentary beliefs that higher effort in the learning of AET would be followed by good performance or grades, which would lead to positive outcomes. This was coupled with valence motivation, where inmates seemed to value the potential rewards/outcomes associated with the specific results or behaviours, for example, obtaining a qualification and securing a job. As prison populations have low formal education levels (Vandala, 2019), the inmates embraced the opportunity to upgrade their education. They were motivated by the positive correlation between effort and performance and also desired outcome (Howard, 1989) and therefore chose behavioural acts which would uplift their education. As one of the participants explained:

Some want to improve their education level, having missed for one reason or another outside prison (MP3).

Educator E5 wrote:

They register to improve their literacy levels, to be better people after release.

This was elaborated on by MP4:

Many see better learning opportunities here. They value education to break the cycle of incarceration for themselves and their families.

Educator E6 added:

Some honestly say, without getting education here, you go out blind, having wasted time.

Educational improvement – expectancy, valence and instrumentality motivation for participating in AET programmes – was apparently important among inmates, given their low literacy levels.

In the views of participants, inmates understood their low level of education as having adversely affected their lives before imprisonment and that this would limit their employment opportunities following their release. Therefore, prison education would play an important role in developing and advancing their life skills vital for re-integration into communities.

All the centre managers and educators at AET centres in protected spaces in this study perceived that a strong pull/push factor in AET programmes was the expectation of employment after their release. E2 commented:

Their aim is to look for employment and work after leaving prison.

This portrayed instrumentality motivation, given that this type of motivation relates to an individual's beliefs or expectations that if they behave in a certain way, they will obtain or achieve certain end results (Howard, 1989; Seongsin, 2007). Concurring with this reasoning, E9 explained:

They want to upskill themselves so that they have something when looking for employment to start lives afresh.

It appears, then, that securing employment was a condition for turning lives around and living crime-free lives. MP5 also added:

They want to equip themselves ready to go out to work. Some even come back here for supplementary exams. One refused release for another year to finish, saying he won't make it through AET outside.

However, formal employment opportunities may be minimal, Astray-Caneda et al. (2011) indicate that more than 650 000 prisoners released from US prisons seek employment, but that their job prospects are low. Koo (2015) concluded that education increases the opportunities for employment and higher salaries after release because, in general, the higher the educational level, the greater the potential to find employment and obtain higher wages. But while, in general, VIE motivation for participating in AET programmes related to employment, other inmates were perceived to anticipate challenges in securing formal employment in view of their incarceration records. MP4 explained:

They know it's difficult with criminal records. So, they want to learn everything: business courses, wholesale, retail, small and medium enterprises for self-employment.

Many South African ex-offenders struggle to secure employment (Ngabonziza & Singh, 2012). However, employment would help ex-offenders to live productively and boost their self-esteem, sense of belonging and self-worth. After serving their sentences, it would be up to them, and for the good of their communities, to have a decent chance to re-enter society successfully, become employed and live fulfilling lives (Coates, 2016).

### **To prevent relapse into criminal activity and prepare for a crime-free life**

Allowing inmates to leave prison with the same educational deficiencies which they brought into prison may increase the possibilities of re-offending. E8 explained:

They want to escape gangsterism in cells, because they don't want to carry it out when released as it can bring them back here.

As alluded to earlier, education offers a less costly alternative for recidivism reduction compared to other solutions, given that, annually, it might cost twice the amount to feed and accommodate a prisoner than to educate them while in prison (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012; Bender, 2018).

Vroom (1964) indicates that before making decisions, individuals estimate how the outcome will play out; for instance, in the above extract, how learning will play out compared to gangsterism. This would propel their VIE motivation to act in a certain way (engaging in AET) because they would see a reward at the end. Violent acts among prisoners are generally linked to prison gangs and are often a major cause of criminal acts in prisons: Lindegaard and Gear (2014) discovered that prisons with higher percentages of gangs experienced higher rates of inmate homicides. Nel (2017) concurs that gangs are prominent in South African prisons and are considered an adaptation strategy to extremely coercive and oppressive prison environments. However, while gangs often jeopardise the personal safety of inmates, they also ironically often offer inmates a sense of safety. Gangs and gang membership also create a sense of power and invincibility (Nel, 2017).

Other prisoners, according to the perceptions of the participants, were motivated by VIE to enrol in AET as a strategy for correcting their criminal behaviour. E1 narrated:

Some want to be better people after release, to correct criminal behaviour.

MP5 also explained:

These people now want fulfilment, to prevent re-offending; one said, ‘... to get my mind from same old wrongdoings that got me here.’

Because of valence motivation, they place great value on the reward or the outcome, given their needs or preferences (Guntoro & Fongmul, 2016) – in this case, being better people. Valence is characterised by the extent to which a person values a given outcome or reward of an act. Apparently, participation in AET programmes offered some prisoners space to reflect and practise being crime-free citizens. It can also be concluded from the managers’ and educators’ perceptions that inmates’ VIE motivations to participate in AET programmes were grounded in a desire to transform, to make personality changes (Illeris, 2009).

In the case of other prisoners, the participants perceived that their VIE motivation emanated from an awareness that education was the choice between a crime-infested and a productive life. They perceived AET programmes to be vital to influencing inmates’ families and communities to trust and rebuild confidence in them after their release. MP3 commented:

To be responsible people, holding something in their hands, with crime-free, decent happy living where family trusts them, want to show that people can change.

In a similar vein, E4 also said:

... start learning to be people, think through things ‘to make good to my victims, family, so they trust me, be proud of me, see a person, not a murderer, or thief, be responsible for my family’.

And E11 elaborated:

Yeah! Some say they enjoy learning, teachers encourage them, they had never been encouraged to do good, except criminal acts by other criminals. One said it was first time anyone recognised his potential and encouraged him ...

E5 explained:

One said, ‘I started getting into trouble very young, skipping school, and started doing terrible things.’ Now he wants to learn, get a job, look after his mother, make good to everyone and show his victims that he [had] changed.

These responses suggest valence because the outcomes from performance were regarded as valuable – a qualification might produce valued outcomes such as regaining recognition, trust and responsibility. It can also be theorised that trust, recognition and responsibility were valuable valence motivations for signing on to AET. In managers' and educators' views, these inmates had lost the trust, recognition and responsibility in their families and communities and wanted to regain them. Vroom (1964) indicates that unless individuals are motivated by having an end goal in mind, they may view the work involved to reach the goal or attain a reward as too difficult or too much work to be worth the goal or the reward.

'Making good' implies making amends with their families, victims and society at large. AET provided one avenue that inmates felt would enable them to reflect and make some form of amends. Apart from learning, the respondents perceived that for many inmates, education was pivotal to the process of getting out of the 'glooms' – to ascend and adopt a different 'self' (Richards & Jones, 2004). Being afforded learning opportunities, and being supported, encouraged and equipped with the capabilities to be the responsible people they were initially supposed to be, portrayed instrumentality motivation.

### **To take the mind off imprisonment and kill time**

In this study, some of the inmates were prompted by expectancy, valence and instrumentality motivations to participate in AET programmes in order to take their minds off imprisonment and to kill time.

Respondent E3 wrote as motivation:

To keep busy, prevent idleness in cells. They say there is nothing else to do, they get bored just sitting around, studying, they pass time.

MP1 confirmed:

Some say they suffer here, walking up and down hallways cell to cell, under surveillance 24/7 you go mad.

Learning engagement here demonstrates inmates' VIE motivation to take their minds off incarceration and kill time in their rule-bound and coercive settings. Vuk and Dolezal (2019) suggest that engagement in structured learning and pro-social activities in correctional institutions enhances positive behavioural and emotional outcomes for prisoners, as opposed to idleness, which triggers negative inmate behaviour that can pose serious threats to staff and the institution.

Some managers and educators perceived that AET had changed the prison culture in the centres owing to changes in inmates' mindsets.

Participant E7 elaborated:

They run away from boredom, idling, here their mind-set changes, they become serious, enjoy and are protected.

Serving long sentences without productive activities exposes inmates to ‘inmate code’ and greater adherence to it, including higher levels of prisonisation (Vuk & Dolezal, 2019). The term ‘Inmate Code’ or ‘Convict Code’ refers to rules and values developed among prisoners inside the prison system which define an inmate’s image as exemplary and prisoners often use it to emphasise their unity against correctional staff. On the other hand, prisonisation is an inmate code that generally means taking on and accepting the practices, behaviour patterns, customs, mores, culture and social life of the prison. Often, new offenders accept prisonisation and criminal values. Some inmates were apparently escaping these practices, as MP4 reflects:

They want to ‘run’ away from prison, here [in an ATE centre] they are ‘away’; this prevents sinking into prisonisation. They value being with outsiders of the system, educators. They enjoy the trust not found with insiders.

It can be theorised that engagement in AET protected such inmates from prisonisation and earned them the trust of ‘outsiders’. Evidence further indicates that AET participation was primarily a mechanism for surviving an unfriendly environment.

Behan (2014) found that some inmates attended education programmes because there was nothing else for them to do. Key and May (2019) refer to this as ‘escaping from the prison’ as the time spent in prison school activities did not feel like a prison to them. Crewe (2012:119), in a Wellingborough prison study, discovered that in the education department,

... prisoners found sanctuary from the stresses of prison life and from the normal terms on which staff–prisoner relations were founded ... one of the few zones within the institution that didn’t ‘feel like a prison’.

The above was certainly the case with some prisoners in the protected spaces explored in this study, as can be ascertained from the perceptions of the participants who confirmed that some inmates joined AET to escape from the daily drudge of the regime to a place where ‘you are treated with some dignity and respect’ (Behan, 2014:24).

## **Conclusion and implications**

This study sought to elicit the views of prison instructors with regard to reasons why prisoners pursue AET programmes. From the data gathered, prisoner participation in AET was indeed influenced by VIE motivations as outlined by Vroom (1964). It could be concluded that inmates, according to centre managers and educators, joined AET because they believed

putting in an effort would yield good performance, which in turn might produce outcomes (e.g. good grades) and ultimately obtain desirable rewards.

Prisoners, according to respondents in this study, pursued AET programmes to improve their education and prepare for employment following their release.

Prisoners wanted to prevent a relapse into criminal activities and re-imprisonment and to prepare instead for a crime-free life. Third, they desired learning to take their minds off their incarceration and help them to pass the time in prison constructively.

These findings on prisoner motivations have some implications for policy and practice. To begin with, the attitudes and trust of the public and employers play a significant role in prisoners' re-integration into communities and employment. Ex-offenders need to be given opportunities to rebuild their lives through the provision of basic workplace skills for employment, supportive contexts for rebuilding trust and, as suggested by Johnson (2015), enabling activities that support re-entry into communities. In addition, through policy, employers should be encouraged not to turn down job applications from ex-offenders based on their criminal records, but instead examine their backgrounds and their life circumstances that led to crime; identify potential strengths and risk factors (UNODC, 2015) and then consider hiring them.

While this study of limited scope yielded valuable findings, it involved only five of the nine provinces, and one centre per province, therefore future research based on a larger, more representative sample could substantively expand upon the findings of the present study.

In closing, although the focus of this study was on prisoner motivations and not the quality of delivery or other issues, centre managers mentioned their own frustrations in trying to deliver quality AET programmes, including a lack of support from AET authorities and inadequate teaching and learning resources. Educators expressed feelings of professional isolation which impacted on their classroom delivery and suggested they be included in staff development initiatives to assist them. The study herein inadvertently highlighted potential systemic problems which would be worth following up on in future research endeavours.

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