

## **Prisoner to Lawyer, Wayward to Welder: Tanzanian Prison Education through the Lens of ‘Perspective Transformation’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This qualitative case study discusses the contribution of prison education on prisoners’ rehabilitation through a change of frames of references. The study addresses one key research question: Does prison education in Tanzania contribute to prisoners’ perspective transformation? In this study, one lens through which I view prison education is that of perspective transformation, which enables individuals to critically reflect upon and change their previous frames of references for the better. This article draws ideas from Mezirow’s ‘perspective transformation’ and discusses the connections between prison education and rehabilitation of prisoners. A snowball technique helped to locate two ex-prisoners who attended prison education, and they were individually interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This study indicates that the two ex-prisoners had undergone a perspective transformation. Hence, it could be argued that prison education can transform prisoners. From this perspective, the study calls for prisons to expand educational access to prisoners.*

**Key Words:** *Transformation, Perspective Transformation, Prison Education, Lifelong Learning, Adult Education*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Literature suggests that prisons were introduced to punish offender as a way to curb criminality among people within a wider social context (JustSpeak, 2014; Materni, 2013; Pollock, 2014; Roberts, 2007; van Ginneken, 2016). Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a punitive approach to imprisonment was commonly used (Pollock, 2014). From a punitive perspective, it is assumed that human beings make rational choices in committing crimes, and therefore, deserve to be punished for the crimes they commit. Consequently, the society assumes that “Prison life should be uncomfortable – even painful – so that rational people will be deterred from committing a crime. If a short prison term doesn’t work, the next sentence should be longer” (Pollock, 2014, p. 9). However, researchers have consistently found that this punitive approach has failed to reduce crime because the method does not address the real causes of crime for the majority of prisoners. It is noted here that the underlying causes of criminal behaviours are complex and related to multiple factors from personal, contextual, to environmental.

Nevertheless, researchers suggest that the majority of prisoners have poor education and low/no work skills, which are key contributing factors behind their offending behaviour (Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Cataldi, & Tauschek, 2004; The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). The literature attests that the punitive approach does not address issues of poor education and low/no work skills among prisoners. Consequently, when prisoners get back to their original environment, with the additional label of “ex-convict”, most of them end up reoffending (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011; Frederick & Roy, 2003). It is also argued that the punitive approach helps to harden prisoners, and hence increases the possibility of reoffending (Cullen et al., 2011; Kemp & Johnson, 2003; Scott & Flynn, 2014). For this reason, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some prisons (in different countries) have been adopting more liberal approaches to imprisonment (Pollock, 2014). These approaches focus on prisoners’ reformation through rehabilitation programmes such as education, work skills, and treatment of drug addiction (Cullen et al., 2011; Pollock, 2014; The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). The purpose is to provide prisoners with skills that would help them in rehabilitation. Researchers have consistently found that liberal approaches to imprisonment, that emphasise rehabilitation programmes, contribute to the reduction of recidivism rates among prisoners (Callan & Gardner, 2007). Despite this move to liberal approaches, many people and prison systems, especially in developing countries, still prefer the punitive perspective of imprisonment (Cullen et al., 2011; Kemp & Johnson, 2003; Nyoka, 2013), because of

the social attitude that prisoners deserve punishment (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012; Zahn, 1997). It is noted here that in Tanzanian prisons, punitive approaches are very common (Kusupa, 2011; Nyoka, 2013). In this study, through the lens of perspective transformation theory (Mezirow, 1997, 2003), I examine the contribution of prison education to prisoners' transformation as revealed from this research. The argument in this article is based on the analysis and comparison of the experiences of two ex-prisoner participants (who were involved in prison education) with the literature on perspective transformation and other prison education literature.

### **Perspective Transformation Theory**

Perspective transformation refers to a change of one's "frames of references"<sup>2</sup> resulting from reasoning and reflection on previously held values, beliefs, and attitudes that resulted in one's behaviour and actions (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Perspective transformation can occur when an individual is faced by a confusing dilemma. Sometimes this dilemma is associated with painful challenges which force individuals to examine their current and previous frames of reference, and explore new options to solve the dilemma after realising that they were on the wrong side and hence decide to change; they form new frames of references (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (2000, p. 22) proposed the following steps for perspective transformation to occur:

- A disorienting dilemma
- Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- A critical assessment of assumptions
- Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Planning of a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Provisionally trying out new roles
- Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Mezirow's perspective transformation theory has three themes – the centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse – which are common in the process of meaning making and transformation. Learner's experience is the starting

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<sup>2</sup> Prior experiences, concepts, feelings, attitudes, and values

point and a core aspect for transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). It is argued in the current article that Mezirow's perspective transformation explains people's attitudes and understanding of their lives (frames of references) and how they seek to change those frames of references based on the experiences they have undergone. Perspective transformation is commonly advocated for the field of adult education; education is not only the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values, but also a means to transform adults into better persons (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Mezirow's perspective transformation is criticised for too much focusing on the individual and overlooking one's social context (Collard & Law, 1989). It is argued that Mezirow "fails to take into account the issues of the individual in relation to context and issues of collective action" (Hoggan, Mälkki, & Finnegan, 2017, p. 54). In this article, it is not my intention to ignore this criticism, but it is unwise to disregard Mezirow's contribution to adult education entirely. Perspective transformation is considered relevant to prison education because ex-prisoners have had prior frames of references (experiences, concepts, feelings, attitudes, and values) which resulted in their conviction. I argue here that perspective transformation is key to prisoners' rehabilitation because "the central element to the perspective transformation is *critical self-reflection*"<sup>3</sup> (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 112). Given relevant support, prisoners can undertake critical reflection of their situation and be in a better position to become better citizens. I have employed Mezirow's perspective transformation to discuss indications of self-reflection from ex-prisoners.

### **Perspective Transformation in The Prison Context**

Reuss (1997) conducted a study on higher education and personal change in Full Sutton maximum security prison (UK). One of her findings suggests that through undertaking and achieving higher education, some prisoners were transformed. They were able to identify wrongdoings within the society; things that they believed in before undertaking education in prison. In his study on prison education in Ireland, Behan (2014) also reported some prisoners reflecting on their previous life and showing readiness to change. This study notes that Reuss's and Behan's studies are from Western (developed) countries, which have different economies and cultures from that of Tanzania. For this reason, one may think that it is not wise to use the findings of these studies as the basis to argue for the same in Tanzania. However, it is argued here that the findings of these studies are the indicators that a shift from the punitive (deterrence and incapacitation) to the liberal (reformation and

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<sup>3</sup> Critical self-reflection is a reasoning process through which an individual makes meaning of his/her experience.

rehabilitation) approaches to imprisonment, which embraces prison education, can work (Pollock, 2014). With the attainment of prison education, prisoners can change their prior frames of references and view life in a different (more positive) way. From this point of view, arguably, prison education can be used to facilitate perspective transformation among prisoners, and subsequently enable rehabilitation among prisoners.

### **Tanzanian Prisons - The Context**

This article is developed from the data gathered in Tanzania – a country located in East Africa. Tanzania has 126 prisons, which are categorised as central, district, and agricultural/open prisons (Inmate Rehabilitation and Welfare Services Tanzania, 2014; The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017a). The central prisons (12) are located in zones (East, West, North, Southern, Southern Highland, Central, and Lake Zones) and the district prisons (68) are located in various districts. Agricultural/open prisons (46) are located in rural areas, where agriculture is the main activity. The central prisons have maximum security, followed by district prisons with medium security and agriculture prisons with low security. All 126 Tanzanian prisons are public prisons, with the capacity of 29,552 prisoners (Mikongoti, Mlowe, & Wazambi, 2016; The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017b). However, they currently hold about 33,517 prisoners (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017b), with about 47% reoffending rates (Inmate Rehabilitation and Welfare Services Tanzania, 2014).

Reports show that most Tanzanian prisoners are illiterate and have no/little work skills (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). It is argued here that this poor educational background and low work skills among the Tanzanian prisoners are a reflection of worldwide reported prisoners' characteristics. These characteristics are usually assumed to be the main contributing factors for offending and reoffending behaviours (Klein et al., 2004; The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). Therefore, prison education should be considered a necessary component of rehabilitation programmes in Tanzanian prisons. At the moment, education is not a mandatory component in Tanzanian prisons. Very few Tanzanian prisons offer prison education options to only a few prisoners (Msamada, 2013; Msoroka, 2018). The main educational programmes in Tanzanian prisons include literacy education and vocational training. On one hand, access to literacy classes depends on prisoner's will. On the other hand, access to vocational training is determined by prison officers' will; only a few prisoners are selected to participate in vocational programmes (Msoroka, 2018). Although this study suggests that prison education has the power to transform prisoners, it is noted here that prisons have great role to influence

educational access to prisoners. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Tanzania Prison Service (TPS) and the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) has enabled a few prisoners to undertake tertiary education (Kazinja, 2014). Nevertheless, one of the participant of the current study noted that it was not easy for him to register for the programme. He said:

*It wasn't easy for me to start my education. Mr Suleiman [the former prime minister] intervened in the process, something which helped me to undertake my studies. One day he visited the OUT and found information regarding my application. He ordered the OUT to take me in, and he wanted immediate feedback. That information was reported by mass media; it disturbed the top prison management. It was chaos. As a result, I was also harassed by the prison management. They thought I was a politician who wanted popularity. Actually, I'm not a politician, and I don't like politics. My only aim was to get an education. I told the Commissioner General that my aim was to bring changes in the prison system regarding prison education. (Bakari; Int.)*

The reluctance of the prison management to allow Bakari to undertake education may be an indication of the system which relies on the punitive nature of prisons (Pollock, 2014). The situation may also indicate discontent on the part of the prison management to allow him (Bakari) to undertake a degree, being a level of education that even some of the prison staff did not have (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Thomas, 1995). However, the current Tanzanian situation has slightly improved, especially after Bakari's success and the agreement between the Tanzanian Prison Service (TPS) and the OUT. Two more prisoners have studied for bachelor degrees, and one undertook a diploma qualification; this suggests that there is a little shift of mindset among the prison staff (Mezirow, 1991, 1997). Bakari, in this case, is a living example of a person who never gave up on his dreams (acquiring tertiary education in prison) despite the hardships and poor support from prison authorities at initial stage. He deserves credit for the current achievements of other prisoners who have got a chance to undertake tertiary education; he brought tertiary education for prisoners to the attention of the Government. However, access to education is still a challenge to many prisoners. There are several barriers that inhibit access to education among Tanzanian prisoners. The main ones include budget constraints (shortage of funds), inadequate infrastructures, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and irrelevant curriculum. These barriers are extensively discussed in Msamada (2013) and in Msoroka (2018). Although studies such as Msamada (2013) and Mboje (2013) delved into prison education in Tanzania, neither of those studies investigated Tanzanian prison education through the lens of perspective transformation. While

Msamada's study focused on the prospects and challenges of prisoners in Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Mboje assessed the role of vocational skills in prisoners' rehabilitation. In the current study, I view prison education through the lens of perspective transformation; I argue that prison education can partly contribute to prisoners' transformation. I will later illustrate how this was the case for two ex-prisoners in my research.

### **Methodology**

This study employed interpretive paradigm which is concerned with understanding the social phenomenon as it is from subjective experiences of individuals to build the meaning. As opposed to measurement, meaning is built from interaction with participants (by interviews or observations), relying very much on a relationship between the researcher and participants and it is developed by people while interacting with the environment (Collins, 2010; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Snape & Spencer, 2003). This belief calls for researchers to find meaning from participants' perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm guided me in interpreting the indicators of perspective transformation. It should be noted that the current research used two ex-prisoners (Bakari and Swai) as case studies. These ex-prisoners were involved in prison education while serving their sentences. I viewed ex-prisoners' understanding to prison education as subjective and multiple, gained through their interaction with the prison environment (Collins, 2010; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Snape & Spencer, 2003). With this view, as a researcher, I sought information related to their involvement in prison education from their point of view as ex-prisoners. This qualitative study drew heavily from a narrative inquiry. "Often narrative inquiry research has a few participants, sometimes only one but more commonly 4-6 participants" (Haydon, Browne, & Riet, 2017, p. 3). As it will be seen below, this study involved two ex-prisoners. Involving a few participants allowed in-depth collaboration between a researcher and participants during data collection; this helped to understand participant's experience on prison education (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Haydon et al., 2017). I enquired into ex-prisoners' whereabouts from prison staff. Through the communication provided by prison staff, I was able to approach four ex-prisoners who were conveniently available. The "convenience" technique allowed me to select the said four ex-prisoners who were "easily accessible and willing to participate in a study" (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 78). Meeting with these (four) ex-prisoners, I found that only two of them had a chance to undertake education while in prison. Because this study aimed at the contribution of prison education, the two ex-prisoners who undertook prison education were included in the study and the other two were left out. I arranged between two and

three meetings with each of the two ex-prisoners at suitable places (suggested by themselves) where they felt comfortable. These meetings were aimed at building good relationship with the participants so as to gain their trust (Haydon et al., 2017). During those meetings, the two ex-prisoners were convinced to tell their stories (individually) in relation to their experience on prison education. I used probing questions here and there to stimulate the story whenever I felt necessary (Patton, 2002). Each one-to-one meeting took a maximum of 90 minutes. This time-span gave the researcher and the participant sufficient time to immerse in the story and hence participants were more open to sharing relevant narrations related to their experiences on prison education. Because Bakari and Swai are Tanzanians who speak Kiswahili fluently and comfortably, I allowed them to tell their stories in Kiswahili to enable freedom of expression. With their consent, I voice recorded their (stories) narrations and supplemented it with field notes.

The voice recorder that contained their stories was carefully listened to and transcriptions were made. It should be noted that while listening to voice records, I was also reading field notes (concurrently) to find areas that I put special emphasis. Writing transcripts from the raw data enabled me to become more familiar with and deeply understand the data (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The original versions of the transcriptions were in Kiswahili, as they were from Kiswahili stories, and later I translated them into English, making sure that I kept the original meaning conveyed by the two ex-prisoners. Using inductive content analysis and perspective transformation, I then analysed the findings. I read their stories (narrations) and noted the reasons they joined education in prisons, the process they went through to attain education, outcomes of education in their current life, and what they current do. I interpreted ex-prisoners' stories to find the connections between their experiences and perspective transformation theory. I gathered all stories/narrations from participants that indicate a change in the frame of references among ex-prisoners, and use them as quotes to support my arguments in the article. The names used in this article are all pseudonyms to ensure privacy and anonymity.

### **Short Description of the Ex-Prisoners Involved**

Bakari and Swai are among the few ex-prisoners who were able to get chance to attend education/training while in prison. Bakari is in his 50s; he was sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment in the 1990s. He spent almost 20 years in prison, before he won his appeal. Swai is young; he is in late 20s. He was a non-persistent secondary school boy when convicted in 2007. He was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. While in prison, Bakari used the opportunity to undertake a Bachelor of Law (LLB) through



the Open University of Tanzania. He used the Law knowledge he gained to contest for his appeal and succeeded. He is now managing a legal aid Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) which supports prisoners. Unlike Bakari, Swai did not undertake tertiary education while in prison; he attended a vocational training course and specialised in welding skills. During this study, Swai was found utilising the skills he gained in prison as he was working with a private company that assembles car bodies.

#### *Indicators of Perspective Transformation*

Bakari and Swai – who came out from different prisons – had different historical backgrounds and different motives to attend prison education. They also faced different challenges during their release. In the beginning of his prison life, Bakari, on one hand claimed that he almost lost the purpose of life. He said:

*My friend, before my imprisonment, I was someone with his reputation. When I got into prison I almost lost the purpose of life. I had the feeling that my life had no meaning any more. I found that all people around me were not friendly to me; they considered me a useless person. To be honest, I didn't see the meaning of life (Bakari; Int.)*

All of the sudden, Bakari became a hero after being able to attain a bachelor degree while in prison. He said:

*You know what? When convicted, my reputation was totally destroyed. I became of no value to society; nobody considered me a potential person in the community. But after my graduation – an event which was reported by mass media around the country – my reputation went high. Nobody considered my conviction story. I was regarded as a person of higher status, and that being in prison was just a life transition, which anyone could pass through. I became a hero. As we speak now, I'm a highly respected person. People started to call me "Honourable Bakari," not just Bakari as it was before. This recognition started even before my release. (Bakari; Int.)*

Along the same lines, Bakari explained what happened after his release. He said:

*Immediately after my release, the DPP [Director of Police Prosecutor] called me to his office. He personally phoned the Court of Appeal to inform them that I was needed in his office. He wanted to see me personally. When I visited the office, they [workers] welcomed me positively. (Bakari; Int.)*

On the other hand, Swai admitted that, before imprisonment, he was not a person who cared about anything. He commented:

*Brother, before I went into prison and attend the training, I was really a naughty boy. I didn't care for anything or anyone. Even when my elders asked me to behave I ignored them. I could anything to anyone without hesitation. That careless thing led me into school dropout and finally I found myself in prison. (Swai; Int.)*

Because of his background, even after his release, Swai was regarded a threat by his society. Swai said:

*I came back to my home place [Moshi] immediately after my release. You know how people look at you when you get out of prison; they looked at me in a negative way. They lost their trust in me. (Swai; Int.)*

The above stories indicate how the two ex-prisoners had different experiences before imprisonment and on their release. However, they both showed several indicators that reflect a change in their frames of references. In this section, I will discuss indicators that I have associated with perspective transformation. I will use the quotes from the two ex-prisoners to support my arguments. One of the ex-prisoners said:

*Fortunately, I was self-aware when I went to prison. I knew that if I could use well the time in prison, I could come out a different person on my release. Therefore, I asked to join metal works department. (Swai; Int.)*

Swai's comment is an indication that he was internally motivated to change. Hence, it could be argued here that internal motivation can contribute to perspective transformation among prisoners. During interview, Swai openly admitted that he was a changed person.

*Mr X, you should know that you are now talking to a rehabilitee. I have changed, my friend; I don't expect to go back to prison. With my skills, I'm now making good money. (Swai; Int.)*

I associate these indicators with a change of Swai's frames of references. Swai's comments indicate that he had reviewed his previous frames of references (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2003) and found that he was pursuing the wrong course. Therefore, he made up his mind to change and become a new person. Swai's comments and a comment from Bakari showing improved reputation discussed above are the reflection of Hughe's (2013) views on "self-perceptions of change". Hughes (2013) argues that education can enable prisoners "in rebuilding spoiled identities" (p. 89); it can improve positive self-perceptions among prisoners. Bakari's case was different.

In the 1990s, prisoners who wanted to write their appeals did not have anyone (professional lawyer) to assist them. They used “paralegal lawyers<sup>4</sup>” (within the prison) to help them write their appeals. He claimed:

*I became interested in gaining a Bachelor of Law in 1998. This idea was sparked from reading judgements and writing appeals for other prisoners, an activity that I carried out for so long. Therefore, I thought it would be better if I applied for a law degree which would help me serve my fellow prisoners better. Later, I realised that studying for the Bachelor of Law would be useful for my life after release. I questioned myself, how I would continue working as a lawyer [after my release] if I didn't have a certificate. (Bakari; Int.)*

Based on Mezirow's (1991) argument “any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation” (p. 168), it is likely that the challenge within the prison context explained by Bakari, influenced his thinking. He reflected on his position and decided to be part of the solution. Mezirow (1990) argues that “to make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning” (p. 1). From this point of view, I argue that Bakari's case is a reflection of Mezirow's argument; he made sense of the surrounding prison environment and decided to take action. It is noted here that, usually, societies, including prison staff, have negative attitudes (social rejection) towards prisoners and ex-prisoners (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle, 2008; Raphael, 2007; Schmitt & Warner, 2010), which, arguably, contributes partly to reoffending behaviour. This study suggests that because Bakari and Swai were changed (transformed) and determined to stay away from prison, they were able to overpower the challenge of social rejection. For instance, in the beginning, prison staff did not acknowledge Bakari's undertaking higher education. They made sure that he had a hard time in his studies, but Bakari did not give up. He commented:

*In the beginning, I was ignored by people, especially prison staff. They took my act of studying as useless and a waste of time. They asked, “How can a prisoner undertake a degree course?” This stigma went away after my good performance. (Bakari; Int.)*

As a result of his persistence, this negative perception went away. Bakari noted:

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<sup>4</sup> These are people who do not have the law knowledge, but they have good or moderate educational background which they used to challenge judgements.

*The prison management recognised my good performance and how serious I took my studies and relocated me to a separate room. The stigma went away. I had laid a foundation which made prison officers aware that it is possible to study in prison. (Bakari; Int.)*

A similar battle against stigma was reported by Swai. He explained how he was able to deal with stigma and stayed focused on his course. He noted:

*I came back to my home place [Moshi] immediately after my release. You know how people look at you when you get out of prison; they looked at me in a negative way. They lost their trust in me. You know what? I didn't care. With my metalwork skills, I was able to find a job in a private company in the same year [2013]. (Swai; Int.)*

Bakari and Swai's ability to deal with stigma and be able to remain focused on a new path is arguably an indication that the two ex-prisoners have changed their frames of references. Considering that most employers would not employ ex-prisoners because of stigma (Graffam et al., 2008; Raphael, 2007; Schmitt & Warner, 2010), Swai consciously made sure that his employer did not find his prison history. He commented:

*Parole officers used to visit me. Sometimes they visited me at work while they were in full uniform; they usually call before paying a visit. I don't want my employer to find out that I was in prison. I'm worried that I may be terminated from my work. Therefore, I cautioned them to introduce themselves as my relatives when they visited me at work. When they came to the office, we stepped aside to talk. (Swai; Int.)*

Swai's story is an indication that stigmatisation may be a major challenge even for the transformed and skilled prisoners (Cullen et al., 2011). Stigmatisation can negatively influence the self-esteem and self-identity of ex-prisoners (Asencio & Burke, 2011; Jenkins, 2008; Leverentz, 2006), which may eventually result in reoffending behaviour. In this study, Swai found his own mechanism to conceal his prison background from his employer. However, Bakari's case was different. He was never worried at being identified as an ex-prisoner; even if he wanted to, he would not be able to hide his identity because his graduation and the success of his appeal were publicly broadcasted. This study suggests that Bakari used the publicity as an opportunity to rebuild his life. He used his popularity to easily find a job opportunity in a private organisation immediately after his release. Currently, through his NGO,

he is working with the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)<sup>5</sup> to provide legal aid and counselling services to prisoners. Also, there is an agreement that Bakari's NGO and the OUT work together in conducting research regarding problems encountered by prisoners and to enhance prison education. This development is an outcome of Bakari's transformation.

### **Limitations**

In this article, I have discussed only two cases, therefore I am in no position to claim that this is a representation of prison education and ex-prisoners in Tanzania. Although these cases illustrate that prison education appears to have contributed to perspective transformation of prisoners and increase the likelihood of rehabilitation, it is possible that neither of these two cases are representative of the general population of prisoners in Tanzania. This is a limitation. Given the backgrounds of the Tanzanian prison system and the short description of the two ex-prisoners involved, this article offers readers an opportunity to decide how far the findings presented in this article can be applied to prison system in their own contexts. At the same time, this study opens the door for future research with a higher number of participants to see if the theory holds true with a greater number of ex-prisoners.

### **Conclusion**

Literature suggests that one of the key roles of prisons is to reduce crime (JustSpeak, 2014; Materni, 2013; Pollock, 2014; van Ginneken, 2016). It is also argued that *liberal approaches*, which focus on prisoners' rehabilitation, seem to provide more positive results in reducing crime compared to more *punitive approaches* (Callan & Gardner, 2007; Chavez & Dawe, 2007; Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013; Davis et al., 2014). In this article, I have reflected upon prison education through the lens of perspective transformation. One question - Does prison education in Tanzania contribute to prisoners' perspective transformation? - is addressed by this paper. In this research, there are some indications that Bakari and Swai have undergone perspective transformation. Hence, it is argued here that prison education can contribute to prisoners' perspective transformation. Through the perspective transformation lens (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2003), I hold that a change of prisoners' frames of reference has significantly contributed to Bakari and Swai's rehabilitation. While some scholars (Collard & Law, 1989; Hoggan et al., 2017) argue that Mezirow's perspective transformation fails to regard an individual's social

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<sup>5</sup> The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) offers academic programmes, conducts research, and outreach programmes.

context, I have a different perspective. Mezirow did not disregard the surrounding environment, including the social context, because he insisted that “meaning making” should be associated to one’s personal experience (Mezirow, 1990). Reflecting on one’s personal experience does not completely leave out the surrounding environment, including the social context; it is part of that personal experience. Bakari’s reflection on prison surroundings that offered no professional legal support for prisoners encouraged him to undertake a Bachelor of Law, and became a lawyer. It is suggested here that prisoners’ rehabilitation can be achieved best through the change of mindset (change of previous frames of references).

From this point of view, I would argue that the two ex-prisoners discussed in this article have probably undergone perspective transformation which has contributed to their rehabilitation. In this study, I did not examine (steps) how prison education influenced a change of prisoners’ frames of references as suggested by Mezirow (2000). However, the findings of this study suggests that the tenth step of Mezirow (2000) – a reintegration into life on the basis of conditions dictated by their new perspective – seems to be achieved by Bakari and Swai (ex-prisoners). Therefore, I am arguing here – without ignoring other factors such as social support – that prisoners’ rehabilitation can be achieved best through a change of prisoners’ frames of references, and that prison education can facilitate that change. From this point of view, I encourage prison systems, especially in developing countries and Tanzania in particular, to initiate prison education programmes and methodologies which may help prisoners to critically reflect upon, and critique their previous attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and actions that have brought them in prisons. For better outcome of imprisonment, prison education should be easily accessible to prisoners. Arguably, programmes such as vocational, literacy, and tertiary education would equip prisoners with relevant skills and enable a change of mindset which would help them cope with new lives after their release. These efforts may subsequently influence rehabilitation among prisoners; hence, I call for prisoners to increase prisoners’ access to education. Finally, since this project is an early exploratory research, I suggest an extensive tracer study to explore if this theory “holds water” for a greater number of ex-prisoners in Tanzania.

#### ***Declaration of Conflicting Interest***

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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