

# Barriers to Prison Education: A Tanzanian Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the barriers to prison education from a Tanzanian perspective. The paper addresses one major research question, “What are the barriers to prison education in the Tanzanian context?”. This qualitative study employed multiple-case study design, which involved 51 participants, including 28 inmates, six (6) inmate-teachers, 14 prison officers from five prisons, two (2) representatives from the Institute of Adult Education and a District Adult Education Officer. The data were mainly collected through individual and focus group interviews. Focus Group Interviews were employed to collect information from some inmates who were available in groups. Data from the rest of the participants, including some inmates, were collected through Individual Interviews. Thematic analysis was used to process the data. The study found two main categories of barriers – the prison and imprisonment situation and dispositional – that inhibited participation in prison education. The findings suggest that most prisoners were affected by the barriers associated with “prison and imprisonment situation”; a few were affected by dispositional barriers. It is suggested here that Tanzania should do more to improve prisoners’ access to education in tune with global tendencies to widen participation amid marginalised populations..*

**Key Words:** *Barriers to prison education, prison education, correctional education, participation in prison education, lifelong learning, adult education*

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars have different views regarding the causes of crimes and the role of prison education in helping to alleviate recidivism (Callan & Gardner, 2007; Pollock, 2014). However, many of them agree that the *socio-economic* factors make a significant contribution to criminal behavior. They argue that most criminal behaviours and the likelihood of reoffending are the result of socio-economic structures – low education,

poor work skills, and poverty (Thornberry & Farnworth, 1982; Weatherburn, 2001; Webster & Kingston, 2014). These circumstances give people no hope for a better life; they feel that they have nothing to lose. Several studies have shown the link between imprisonment and these structural level factors. In the USA, for instance, Lochner and Moretti (2004) reported the link between low education, criminality, and incarceration. In Australia, out of 6,386 prisoners in the state of Victoria, only 246 attained secondary school education prior to their imprisonment (Victorian Ombudsman, 2015). Similarly, in the UK, about 50% of prisoners had low reading skills, 66% had low numeracy skills, and about 81% had low writing skills (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). Relatively similar findings were also reported in New Zealand (Edwards & Cunningham, 2016) and Finland (Koski, 2009). The Tanzanian situation is no different as it is reported that about 75% of prisoners in Dodoma region have minimal literacy skills (Sauwa, 2010; The United Republic of Tanzania, 2014).

Studies suggest that prison education can improve education and work skills among prisoners, and reduce reoffending rates (Bozick, Steele, Davis, & Turner, 2018; Callan & Gardner, 2007; Davis et al., 2014). Despite this sobering suggestion, and the fact that prison education is a subset of adult education, this field (prison education) is not extensively researched in Tanzania. Very few studies (Mboje, 2013; Msamada, 2013) have examined this topic, and none of them has researched the barriers to prison education. Therefore, this current study aims to address this research gap. One question this research project addressed is: *What are the barriers to prison education in the Tanzanian context?* This article discusses the barriers to prison education from participants' perspectives. It is hoped that this article will contribute to the wider discussion on the barriers to prison education and open up a new debate on the same issue in the Tanzanian context.

### **Barriers to Adult Education**

The focus of this article is on barriers to prison education. Because prison education is a subset of adult education, this article will first (briefly) discuss the general barriers to participation in adult education before embarking on barriers to prison education. Adult education scholars have grouped barriers to adult education in different ways. Johnstone (1963) is among the pioneers who studied barriers to adult education. He developed two

clusters of barriers: *external/situational* barriers – that emerge from outside of the learner (e.g. family, social, and work responsibilities) – and *internal/dispositional* barriers – that grow from within the learners themselves (beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions about oneself and/or education e.g. a feeling of being too old to learn). Cross (1979) expanded on Johnston’s work and proposed a third cluster, *institutional* barriers. The institutional barriers are caused (often inadvertently) by an organisation that offers learning opportunities. Examples are irrelevant content (curriculum), inappropriate marketing and poor timetabling. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) established a fourth cluster, *informational* barriers (the lack of awareness on the part of learners about the available educational opportunities). Consequently, at the moment, these four typologies – situational, psychological/dispositional, institutional, and informational – have become the most cited typologies of barriers to adult learning (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Findsen & McCullough, 2007; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Prison education is undertaken in a different context, namely prisons, which are regarded as “total institutions”<sup>1</sup>. It is noted here that in some cases, prisoners may face relatively similar barriers to those experienced by adult population outside of prisons and some different ones related to the specific prison context. This article extends the discussions regarding the barriers affecting adult education to prisoners – a special group of adult learners.

### **Barriers to Prison Education**

Scholars have suggested several barriers to prison education. For some developed countries, the quoted reasons for poor inmates’ participation in prison education include the lack of proper information for programme opportunities, lack of appropriate programmes, and reduced funds for prison education (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008; Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Also, some prisoners were not permitted to enrol because of disciplinary problems, and others because of the types of their sentences, such as life sentenced prisoners (Braggins & Talbot, 2003; Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Cataldi, & Tauschek, 2004). Some prison staff in

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<sup>1</sup> Highly restricted organisations, isolated from the rest of the world, and operate with structured daily routines; see Goffman, E. (1962). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Chicago: Aldine. Amundsen, D., Msoroka, M., & Findsen, B. (2017). “It’s a case of access”: The problematics of accessing research participants. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(4), 5-17. 10.15663/wje.v22i4.425

the USA have shown resentment toward prisoners being offered a chance at college education (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). This resentment was a problem because sometimes prison staff obstructed the learning process by locking up some prisoners when they needed to attend class. Sometimes, they confiscated inmates' textbooks, or interrupted classes (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Thomas, 1995). In Africa, the situation is worse. Issues related to shortages of funds, poor infrastructure, and a lack of resources have severely affected adequate provision of prison education (Asiimwe & Kinengyere, 2011; Mokwena, 2008; Msoroka, 2018; Sarkin, 2008; Setoi, 2012). The following sections will discuss these barriers in relation to the Tanzanian context of prison education.

### **The Context of Tanzanian Prisons**

Tanzania has a total of 33,517 prisoners (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017c) incarcerated in 126 public prisons. These 126 prisons are grouped into Central/Maximum Security (12), District/Medium Security (68), and Agricultural/Open/Low Security prisons (46) (Inmate Rehabilitation and Welfare Services Tanzania, 2014; The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017b). It should be noted that these 126 (Tanzanian) prisons have the capacity of 29,552 prisoners (Mikongoti, Mlowe, & Wazambi, 2016; The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017c). Hence, the current number of incarcerated prisoners (33,517) indicates overcrowded prisons in Tanzania. This article holds that Tanzanian prisoners are not different from other prisoners around the world; most of them are illiterate and have little work skills (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). Despite the observation that prison education is a necessary programme for prisoners' rehabilitation, education is currently not an obligatory component for Tanzanian prisoners. The available policy document (Prison Education Guide) does not legally bind prisons to offer prison education (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011). Consequently, only a few prisons offer educational options to some prisoners (Msamada, 2013; Msoroka, 2018). This suggests that, in Tanzania, participation in prison education is not easy; hence the current study explored this topic from the Tanzanian perspectives.

## **Rehabilitation Theory**

This section discusses the theoretical underpinning of this study. Considering the link between prison education and the reduction of recidivism, this research considered rehabilitation theory relevant to this study. Studies suggest that a reduction of recidivism rates in prisons depends on the availability of rehabilitation programmes within prison systems (The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). Campbell (2005) maintains that rehabilitation is “the process of helping a person to readapt to society or to restore someone to a former position or rank” (p. 831). It is assumed here that for being one of the rehabilitation programmes in prisons, prison education can reduce recidivism rates among prisoners (Klein et al., 2004; The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). Literature holds that in the prison context, “educational, vocational, and psychologically based programmes, as well as specialised services for specific problems, have typically been put forward as means to reform prisoners during their sentence (Campbell, 2005, p. 831). As has been observed, educational programmes in prisons such as vocational training, literacy education, and college education have been used to prepare offenders to reintegrate into the society (Campbell, 2005; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000). These programmes provide skills which can help prisoners to handle their after-release lives (Callan & Gardner, 2007; Davis et al., 2014) and consequently reduce reoffending behaviour among the prisoners (Workman, n.d.). For this reason, it is argued here that the provision of prison education is a significant enterprise. Hence, limiting the provision of educational programmes within prisons (as will be discussed in this article) restricts the government’s efforts towards reshaping prisoners’ behaviours.

## **Methodology**

This research aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of the barriers to prison education in Tanzania. Following Yin’s (2009) suggestion that researchers have to be cautious in case selection; this study selected five prisons which have different characteristics. Two of them were the Maximum Security prisons with some kind of educational programmes (One male’s and the other female’s). The other two were Low Security (males’) prisons (one with some kind of educational programmes while the other had no any educational programme); the fifth one was a youth prison. Arguably, it was more their differences in characteristics which influenced their inclusion in the

rproject than their similarities (Stake, 2000). Participation in this study was voluntary. The participants included inmates (28), prison staff (14), inmate-teachers (6), representatives from the Institute of Adult Education (2), and a District Adult Education Officer. The purpose of selecting prisons and participants with different characteristics was to gain information related to barriers to prison education from different perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). The ethics clearance for this project was granted from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, the University of Waikato (New Zealand), the Regional Commissioner Officers (Tanzania) where the relevant prisons were located, and at prison level.

The interpretivist paradigm was central to this study as we believe that the construction of meaning is subjective and multiple; people generate their version of reality while interacting with their environments (Collins, 2010; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Snape & Spencer, 2003). The interpretivist paradigm involves researchers interpreting meaning from their participants' point of view. This view was key in interpreting the perceived barriers to prison education. Hence, the analysis of data has been based on the participants' perspectives. This study employed a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2007). Five prisons constituted the multiple cases for this project. Purposive sampling was mainly used to select the participants, except for ex-offenders who were located through a snowball approach (Patton, 1990; Tongco, 2007). With purposive sampling, teachers, prisoners, prison staff and other participants from outside of prisons (e.g. adult education officers), who were thought to have relevant information to this study, were selected (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Patton, 1990). While in the field, flexibility was key to effective data collection. For instance at times convenience sampling was used to select participants. This method allowed the selection of participants who were "easily accessible and willing to participate in a study" (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 78). For triangulation purposes, both individual interviews and focus group interviews were used to gather information. Since the participants of this study were Tanzanians who were fluent in Kiswahili language, Kiswahili was used during the interviews to allow greater freedom of expression. Most data were collected in prisons where it was not possible to record the interviews. Hence, extensive notes were generated. During interviews, everything seemed to be important was noted; participants were stopped whenever clarification from interviewees was needed. A

reflective journal (which was used to keep records of everyday's activities) was used to supplement the field notes. Voice recording was used to obtain participants' data outside of the prisons with their consent. Transcriptions were later generated from field notes and voice recording. When developing transcripts from field notes, the notes generated from different interview sessions were read separately. Whenever the gap was observed, researchers used a reflective journal to seek for more information. Then the transcripts were translated into understandable English, with careful attention given to making sure that the original meaning conveyed by the participants was kept. Themes and subthemes developed from this study were inductively generated through thematic analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

Stories from transcripts were read several times, and information related to barriers to prison education was highlighted and noted on the paper margin. The sentences and phrases, which were thought relevant to this study (relevant texts), were intensively examined (Silverstein, 2003). Then, the emerging ideas were written on a separate sheet to form a list of topics (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). With thorough examination (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Merriam, 1998), topics with similar perspectives were identified and marked with similar colours. Then, the topics that seemed to be similar were grouped together to form general themes which were labelled by names that captured the groups best (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Eventually, the study was left with two major themes (categories) – prison and imprisonment situation, and dispositional barriers. Under the first theme, the following eight sub-themes were generated: budget constraints, inadequate infrastructures, insufficient teaching and learning resources, irrelevant curricula, non-credentialed courses, lack of information among prison officers, discriminatory conditions set by prisons, and poor policy interpretation. The second theme had two sub-themes – perceived lack of interest, and truancy and dropout.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Perceived barriers to Prison Education**

This study found that the majority of prisoners did not have access to prison education. Out of 1298 (total) prisoners this study found in all five selected prisons, only 419 (32%) were attending prison education. This finding is similar to Wlodkowski's (2008)

observation that *underrepresented groups* of adults such as prisoners have “underserved students, lacking the accessibility and support, financial as well as academic” (p. 25) to succeed in education. In the present study, several barriers to prison education were observed. Most of the issues raised would fit into some typologies – situational, dispositional, and institutional – discussed previously. However, because of the context of this project (prison), it was extremely difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the “situational barriers” and “institutional barriers”. It was considered that most factors that could be labelled “institutional” were influenced by the prison “situation”. For instance, a lack of relevant curriculum in most selected prisons was influenced by prisons being “total institutions”. Prisons had poor collaboration with other learning institutions (outside of prison system) which could help to provide relevant programmes. For this reason, this study clusters the factors that could be under “institutional” and those which could be under “situational” and calls this cluster “the prison and imprisonment situation”. Also, all issues related to “personal attitudes” were grouped within the “dispositional barriers”. In this study, the majority of the barriers that participants discussed were under the *prison and imprisonment situation*; fewer were recorded under the *dispositional barriers*. However, it is noted here that dispositional barriers, especially for the marginalised adults, are usually the most powerful, but heavily disguised (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Hence, it is not surprising that dispositional barriers were not openly admitted to in this project. This could be associated with a methodological limitation.

### **The Prison and Imprisonment Situation**

The following is a discussion reflecting the barriers that were labelled under “prison and imprisonment situation”.

#### **Budget constraints (shortage of funds)**

The findings of this study suggest that prisons which offered education did so for free and hence prisoners were not required to pay for their learning. However, it was clear that prisons did not have budgets for prison education. The majority of participants complained about the lack of funds to support educational programmes. A prison staff member commented:



*Our prison doesn't have a budget for prison education purpose. We can't afford to buy chalk, notebooks, pens, and textbooks. Sometimes, we are completely out of chalk to run our classes. (Yahaya; Prison staff; Interview)*

*The main problem is how to get those resources. Our prison doesn't have a budget to buy notebooks, pens, chalk and books. (Shida; Prison staff; Interview)*

*Our main challenge is financial constraints. We need funds to buy books and other teaching and learning materials, including tools for workshops. The problem is that the government usually sets funds for prisoners' meals and medication; it doesn't focus on prisoners' education. I think they forget that the prisoners need education for their rehabilitation, which is the main purpose of this prison. (Kapange; Prison staff; Interview)*

It is suggested here that the lack of budget for prison education programmes seems to reflect the Ministerial general budget – The Ministry of Home Affairs (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017a). Although the Minister claimed to pay attention to prisoners' rehabilitation, no funds were allocated for prison education in the 2017/2018 budget. A lack of funds for prison education, as seen in this study, strongly suggests that the Tanzanian Government does not consider prison education a priority in their budgets. Hence, the situation may not support rehabilitation process among the prisoners.

### **Inadequate Infrastructures**

Studies suggest that the learning environment has a significant influence on adults' involvement in education (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Knowles (1980) holds that adults may learn best in an environment that gives them a feeling of being valued. According to Knowles, a learning environment comprises physical and psychological factors. The physical factors are associated with the classroom set up. They include tables and chairs that bring physical comfort during the teaching and learning processes. From a psychological perspective, a positive environment is created by “mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 93). Considering that prison education is a subset of adult education, it could be argued that the learning environment in prison has significant impact in (de)motivating prisoners to participate in education. This can explain why the Prison Education Guide, a local policy document, recommends prisons set aside comfortable learning spaces for prisoners (The United Republic of Tanzania,

2011). However, this study found that teaching and learning environments in prisons were among the main challenges that negatively affected prison education. Out of five selected prisons (all names in this article are pseudonyms), only one (Kipera) had classrooms furnished with desks. One prison (Uluguru) did not have any learning spaces. The other three prisons (Kikuyu, Chinangali, and Lubungo) placed chalkboards on walls outside the prison cells and considered them as the learning spaces. In this situation, learners did not have chairs – some sat on plastic buckets and others on the ground. As the learning spaces were not roofed, teaching and learning could not take place when it rained or when it was too sunny/hot. This finding contradicts recommendations of the Prison Education Guide as seen in the above paragraph (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011). It also contradicts the propositions of adult education scholars who advocate for a learning environment that provides physical comfort for adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

### **Insufficient Teaching and Learning Resources**

This study found that the selected prisons faced a severe shortage of resources. Many prisoners complained of the lack of notebooks, pens, and textbooks. Many prisoners (learners) were taking notes on pieces of papers; they were not happy with that circumstance. Teachers complained about their learners having no notebooks and pens. They also complained about having no chalk to carry out teaching instruction. This shortage of resources forced the closure of two classes in one prison (Chinangali). One prison officer said:

*As you can see, we don't have proper learning areas, and our learners don't have chairs and tables. Some sit on (plastic) buckets and others in the dust. We don't have sufficient exercise books, pens and chalks. As you have observed, some of our classes are closed due to a shortage of resources. (Yahaya; Prison staff; Interview)*

One inmate who left the study programme associated his dropout with shortage of resources. He said:

*Learning was very challenging for me because I didn't have resources. I had no notebooks, no pens. This discouraged me, so I opted out. (Kassim; inmate; Interview)*

*I once joined a class and attended the first, second and third levels. I now have an ability to read and write. However, my class is currently closed due*

*to deficit of resources such as notebooks, pens and chalks. That's what made me drop from studies. (Matengo; inmate; Interview)*

*I have never joined a class since I got into this prison. I know that I have no one to give me writing materials (notebooks and pens); how can I be able to study without writing materials? That discourages me to join any class completely. (Marry; inmate; Interview)*

Kassim's, Matengo's, and Marry's comments may be a reflection of several other prisoners who opted out from prison education programmes for resource reasons. It is argued that the shortage of teaching and learning resources have negatively impacted prison education programmes within the Tanzanian context. However, it is noted here that a shortage of resources is not only facing Tanzanian prisons but also other African countries as well. On this issue, Sarkin (2008) reported that:

*Resource scarcity is one of the most significant challenges facing African prisons today. On a continent with so many social needs, protection of prisoners is far from the top of many priority lists. (p. 32)*

Countries such as Uganda and Kenya have reported insufficient resources for prison education (Asiimwe & Kinengyere, 2011; Dhlamini & Heeralal, 2014; Kyalo, Muiwa, Matuta, & Rutere, 2014). It should be noted that in Africa, a deficit of resources and poor learning environments affect other adult education activities outside of prisons (Dhlamini & Heeralal, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising for this study to find the selected prisons having a shortage of resources for educational activities.

### **Irrelevant Curricula**

The literature suggests that a consideration of learners' needs is a key to the success of adult education programme (Gboku & Lekoko, 2007; Knowles et al., 2005). However, it seems that development of educational programmes in Tanzanian prisons took a different path; prisoners' needs and interests were not taken into consideration. This study suggests that the situation negatively affected prisoners' participation. One prisoner said:

*I'm not happy with classes that I attend here. I would like to have an opportunity to study a complete secondary education curriculum which I have never done before, but it isn't fully available here. (Edward; Inmate; FGI)*

Because the programmes failed to accommodate prisoners' needs and interests, this study found that some inmates were reluctant to join programmes. Some of them commented:

*Here they don't teach a serious secondary education curriculum. Therefore, I don't see an appropriate education for me. Regarding vocational training, I would like to study cookery, but unfortunately, we don't have such training in this prison. (Siwema; Inmate; FGI)*

*I have never attended any education programme at this prison. One of the reasons is that there is no programme of my interest here. I would like to learn electrical studies, which isn't available in this prison. (Matonya; Inmate; Interview)*

This suggests that Tanzanian prisons do not have relevant educational programmes to cater prisoners' needs. For this reason, it is suggested that the Tanzania Prisons Service (TPS) needs to collaborate with other institutions such as the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) to restructure the current prison education courses to better reflect prisoners' needs. This requires effective needs assessment. There is a high possibility that if inmates' learning needs were considered, the number of prisoners involved in prison educational programmes would have increased. One would argue that the irrelevant curricula, as seen in the current study, have possibly contributed to inmates' negative attitude towards prison education (Wlodkowski, 2008).

### ***Non-credentialed courses***

Some adult education literature suggests that the majority of adult learners can be motivated to learn for the sake of attaining formal qualifications (credentials) (Kim, Hagedorn, Williamson, & Chapman, 2004; Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke, 2009). In the prison education context, Braggins and Talbot (2003) made similar observations with respect to UK prisons. They found that some prisoners did not want to attend education programmes which did not award certificates; they said it was "a waste of time" (p. 35). The current study found that most educational programmes in the selected prisons were non-credentialed. This lack of credentialed courses discouraged many prisoners from participating in programmes. One prisoner said:

*They don't provide certificates for the courses they offer. If I study, I would like to be awarded a certificate of graduation. (Matonya; inmate; Interview)*

A similar discouraging tone was also observed from prisoners who participated in programmes. One of them complained:

*Having no certificate awards in these programmes discourages the majority of inmates from participating in education. At times, I also want to stop attending these classes because I prefer to sit for the National Exams and be awarded a certificate. (Simba; Inmate; FGI)*

This study suggests that several inmates would want to attend educational programmes which guarantee credentials. It is argued that the majority of prisoners would like to use qualifications they gain from prison education to seek jobs (provided by employers or through self-employment) and maybe to further their educational qualifications. One can speculate that post-release employment would be more readily attainable if prison education courses were accredited. Therefore, it is recommended that relevant credentialed courses for prisoners should be introduced in Tanzanian prisons. However, arguing this way does not mean that this study underplays the role of non-credit education/training; such programmes have value for other purposes.

#### ***Lack of information among prison officers***

Regarding information, the findings of the present study differ from those in conventional adult education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Merriam et al., 2007) and other prison education studies (Brosens, Donder, Dury, & Verte, 2015; Crayton & Neusteter, 2008; Davis et al., 2013). The above studies discussed a lack of information regarding learning opportunities on the part of learners (prisoners). While this observation is also true in the Tanzanian prison context, the current study found a significant number of prison officers who were not aware of the opportunity to prison education that prisoners have been granted by the 2011 Prison Education Guide (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011). Some prison officers said:

*A guide for prison education? No, I have never seen or heard about such document. Therefore, I'm not sure if it exists or not. If it exists, I don't know its content. (Tumaini; Prison Officer; Interview)*

*I'm aware of the existence of the said document. It was introduced a long time ago, during Nyerere's era, but many prison officers are not notified of that document. The document is shelved, and in most cases, it is not in practice. Take an example; you have mentioned about the need for prison*

*education coordinator at regional and prison levels, but in practice, we don't have those people. (Tamimu; Prison Officer; Interview)*

Tamimu's comment suggests that he was misinformed about the *2011 Prison Education Guide* (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011); he associated it with Nyerere (the first president of Tanzania), who was in power between 1961 and 1985 (over 30 years ago). Hence, it is argued here that it was the prison staff who did not have reliable information, suggesting a poor flow of information within the Tanzanian prison system. For this reason, one can assume that there was poor implementation of this policy as many staff were not aware of the document (Prison Education Guide) (Stonemeier, Trader, Kaloi, & Williams, 2016). Presumably, the majority of prisoners also were not aware of the learning possibilities in prisons, because the information was not passed on. At this point, it is fair to argue that the poor flow of information regarding the Prison Education Guide may be a result of the low importance attributed to the document, and to prison education itself.

### **Discriminatory conditions set by Prisons**

The findings of the present study suggest that prisons have set conditions such as inmates' behaviour and sentence length which determine whether a prisoner can be involved in vocational training. Some participants commented:

*We allow inmates to attend vocational training based on their interests and willingness. However, we control their number because we cannot allow everyone to join due to limited spaces that we have. Therefore, apart from inmates' interests and willingness, we also consider their sentence length and their behaviour before considering them for vocational training. That's what we do to control their number. (Yahaya; Prison Officer; Interview)*

*Some other prisoners are not allowed to join the course due to bad behaviour. They [prison staff] have selected us based on our behaviours and sentence length. In our team, we are all serving more than five years. (Kobelo; Inmate; Interview)*

*Others are short sentenced prisoners. Therefore, they are not given a chance to join our class as the trade requires a substantial amount of time to understand it well. (Kobelo; Inmate; Interview)*

*For literacy class, it is the illiterate prisoner who decides whether to join class or not, but for metal works and mechanics the criteria is set by prison officials. I have never attended any class as I'm not illiterate and I have never been proposed by the concerned prison officers to join any vocational class. (Isihaka; Inmate; Interview)*

For this reason, one would argue that prison management assumes that attending vocational training is a privilege to prisoners; it is not their right (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012; UN, 1948, 2016). Withholding prisoners from attending vocational training is, therefore, often a punishment for prisoners' inappropriate behaviour. This finding echoes observations from the USA (Klein et al., 2004) and the UK (Braggins & Talbot, 2003) where some prisoners were not allowed to join educational programmes because of misbehaviour. In this article, it is viewed that restricting prisoners' access to education because of misbehaviour is to ignore the fact that prisoners are in custody because of their misbehaviour within that society. Prison officers have a moral obligation to help prisoners change their behaviours (rehabilitation) through various programmes (Braggins & Talbot, 2005). Also, restricting inmates from educational programmes is to ignore the fact that prisoners are human beings (O'Connor, 2017) who are entitled to an education (The United Republic of Tanzania, 1998; UN, 1948).

### ***Poor policy interpretation***

As stated previously, the TPS has introduced a Prison Education Guide, which sets parameters for educational practices in prison. However, some participants' responses suggested poor interpretation of this policy document. Although the Prison Education Guide recommends all prisons conduct prison education programmes (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011), the findings suggest that many prisons do not do this. participants said:

*No, we don't have any educational programmes here. My friend, many prisons [in Tanzania] don't have educational programmes, but I know few prisons with some educational programmes. These prisons include Kipera, Iwambi, Kajiungeni, and Kilimanjaro. (Tumaini; Prison Officer; Interview)*

*In this prison, we don't have any educational programmes. Daily, prisoners are assigned manual work as part of their sentence. It may be working in government buildings, on farms, or in a sisal factory. (Gwakisa; Prison Officer; Interview)*

*I have never engaged in any educational activity since my arrival in this prison because there are no such programmes. But for sure, if there were any programmes, I would have been one of the students in those programmes. (Makingi; Inmate; FGI)*

The Prison Education Guide recommends that inmates should be allowed to take recognised examinations. It states, if possible, "during the National Examinations, the

examinations may be brought into prisons. If not, the candidates [prisoners] may be escorted to the appropriate centre in civilian dress” (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2011, p. 2). Very few heads of prisons allowed prisoners to take recognised examinations. An exceptional example is Kipera prison where prisoners take their examinations at the nearby VETA College or Mlali Primary School. Some heads of prisons do not offer that opportunity; the remaining four prisons selected for this study did not offer such opportunity to prisoners. Komba, one of the Institute of Adult Education officers stated:

*As opposed to the Songea prisoner – who was allowed by the head of the prison to sit his National Examinations at a centre outside Songea prison – Iwambi’s head refused to give them [prisoners who qualified to take National Examinations] permission. He said that he didn’t have the mandate to allow prisoners to take their examinations outside of prison. He directed us to seek permission from the Commissioner General of Prison (CGP). (Komba; IAE; Interview)*

He further said:

*We wrote a letter [to the Head Prison Office] to seek permission for inmates to sit the examinations outside the prison. Unfortunately, the TPS office never responded to our letter [despite the follow-up]. As a result, those inmates didn’t sit those examinations. That discouraged the inmates to proceed with the programme, as well as others to join. (Komba; IAE; Interview)*

These findings indicate inconsistency in the alignment between Prison Education Guide and practices at prison level. Lack of educational programmes in many prisons and the failure to allow inmates to take up their National Examinations in the centre outside of prison, as seen at Iwambi, suggest the possibility that the TPS has failed to engage with the Prison Education Guide (Stonemeier et al., 2016). This is an indication that there is limited chance for Tanzanian inmates to attain rehabilitation.

### **Dispositional Barriers to Prison Education**

As noted previously, in this study, issues related to dispositional barriers were few. Some participants provided stories related to lack of interest and truancy; the only sub-themes which could be labelled under this category.



### **Perceived Lack of interest**

This study found that many prisoners were not participating in prison education. Some responses suggested that perceived lack of interest on the part of prisoners contributed to their poor involvement in prison education. They said:

*I'm close to one prisoner who doesn't have the ability to read and write. I have been trying to encourage her to join me in class, but she refuses. She always tells me that in her life, there is nothing that she dislikes more than schooling. She considers attending education as a waste of time. She thinks that education can't help her in any way based on her current age. She is in her 40s. (Chaurembo; Inmate; FGI)*

*Some other prisoners just don't like to engage in educational activities. It becomes difficult to encourage those inmates to join classes. (Edward; Inmate; FGI)*

*I have never joined a class. My main reason is that I'm not interested in studying. I just don't feel ready. (Peter; Inmate; Interview)*

This finding suggests that there are several prisoners in the selected prisons who had no interest in prison education. It can be argued that prisoners' negative attitude, values, and perceptions have contributed to their lack of interest, which resulted in poor involvement in prison education (Cross, 1979; Merriam et al., 2007). It is possible that this lack of interest among prisoners is linked to their previous negative schooling experiences (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Moriarity, 2014; Wilson, 2007). With such an attitude, one can argue that the identified inmates have limited chances to gain rehabilitation.

### ***Truancy and dropout***

In this study, truancy and dropout were mentioned among the problems that limited the effectiveness of prison education. As mentioned earlier, educational programmes in the selected prisons were vocational training, literacy education, general education, and primary education curriculum. However, complaints in truancy and dropout were only recorded in literacy and general education programmes. Some participants said:

*As monthly reports show, there is a problem of truancy and dropouts among the learners. I will give you some of these reports so that you can verify this. (Kapinga; AEO; Interview)*

*Some prisoners joined the programme and dropped out after some time. (Mkude; Inmate teacher; FGI)*

*In this class, learners' attendance is good. However, sometimes some of them miss class. (Kidawa; Inmate teacher; Interview)*

*I was eager to learn, but I faced the challenge of having no learning materials. At some point, I didn't have any notebook or pen. That discouraged me, and therefore, I opted out. (Kassim; Inmate; Interview)*

The monthly reports collected from the field backed up this finding related to non-credit programmes. Reports supplied by prison authorities showed discrepancies between registered learners and their attendance rates. Although in this case, Kassim's comment suggests that he had his own (probably strong) reasons to quit studies, it is still possible that dispositional factors contributed to his failure to persist, as his classmates did. Several other prisoners (his classmates) persisted in learning despite the lack of notebooks; they were taking notes on pieces of papers.

### **Limitations**

As mentioned earlier, this article is a reflection of the findings of a qualitative research project carried out in five Tanzanian prisons. The five selected prisons may not be a representative sample of 126 Tanzanian prisons. Hence, the findings discussed in this paper may not be relevant for generalisation. Readers can decide whether the findings discussed in this article are relevant to their contexts or not.

### **Conclusions**

This article addressed one major question: *What are the barriers to prison education in the Tanzanian context.* The barriers to prison education in this study have been grouped into "prison and imprisonment situation," and "dispositional barriers". However, in this study, most barriers to prison education are within the prison and imprisonment situation. Very few were labelled as dispositional, though they may have been latent and potentially under-reported by participants. It is suggested in this paper that prisons place little focus on prison education. The TPS has not worked hard enough to improve prisoners' access to education. consequently, a few prisoners had access to prison education. Nevertheless, it is noted here that this is not a new phenomenon in the African context. Most prisoners in the African countries are reported to have limited access to prison education due to a shortage of resources – human, physical, and fiscal (Asiimwe & Kinengyere, 2011; Dissel, 2008; Msoroka, 2018; Sarkin, 2008). There are

two possible explanations of the little focus on prison education in the Tanzanian contexts. First: despite the pledge to focus on prisoners' rehabilitation, the TPS and the Tanzanian penal system in general still use a "conservative" philosophy to imprisonment (Kinemo, 2002; Nyoka, 2013). A conservative philosophy of imprisonment holds that prisoners deserve punishment because they rationally choose to commit crimes. Hence, "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). It can be argued that the prison and imprisonment situational barriers to prison education were affected by this philosophy. Prison education is often seen by society as a soft option for criminals; it is not encouraged within a conservative philosophy. Perhaps this view is common in most prisons in the African context (Sarkin, 2008); it limits the possibility of prisoners' access to education.

However, studies suggest that conservative approaches to imprisonment have failed to address offending and reoffending (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011). Therefore, it is recommended that the TPS needs to reassess its approaches and consider prison education as a high priority. It is suggested that the TPS adapt a more liberal philosophy to imprisonment, which supports prison education (Pollock, 2014). With a liberal philosophy towards imprisonment, the TPS may reduce the barriers to prison education, as seen in this study, and improve prisoners' access to education, which, arguably, can reduce reoffending rate among the Tanzanian inmates (Callan & Gardner, 2007). This is a relevant argument from rehabilitation theory, which guided this study. Second: Tanzanian prisons are "total institutions" (Amundsen et al., 2017; Msoroka, 2018). Total institutions are usually restricted and isolated organisations. They have minimal interactions with other organisations and people outside of the prison system (Goffman, 1962). Several prison and imprisonment barriers, including inadequate infrastructures, irrelevant curricula, and insufficient teaching and learning resources could be reduced if prisons collaborate with other institutions and stakeholders such as the Institute of Adult Education, the Open University of Tanzania, and NGOs. Being total institutions, prisons do not benefit from resources which could be offered by other organisations and

individuals. It is suggested that prisons become much more open to inviting partnerships in rehabilitation programmes, especially in terms of providing prison education.

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