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The Challenges of the Inmates' Adult Educator. A Greek Case Study

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Abstract

The inmates' adult educator implements the principles of adult education in the enclosed prison environment and makes efforts to reintegrate them socially. In Greece, inmates' adult educators mainly work in Second Chance Schools (SCS) operating in prisons. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the challenges encountered by inmates' adult educators at the Second Chance School of Chania Prison. The qualitative method was used in this research. According to the results of the survey, the inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison believe the challenges they encounter derive mainly from the conditions of imprisonment and the inelastic way of prison operation. In addition, they consider that several barriers arise from the particular characteristics of the prisoners and from the deficiencies of the inmates' adult educators themselves.

Keywords: Barriers in Prison Education, Challenges of Inmates' Adult Educator, Second Chance Schools in Prisons

1. Introduction

Inmate's education is intended to change prisoners' behavior so that they can live in harmony with other prisoners and later with the wider community, with the ultimate purpose of "breaking the cycle of crime" (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010, p. 23). Thus, the idea that inmates' adult education plays a crucial reforming role and contributes to the successful social reintegration of prisoners is commonly accepted (EC, 2011).

Nevertheless, many prison systems are in crisis, have the insufficient infrastructure and are crowded with prisoners, with the result that prison management becomes more and more difficult (Muñoz, 2009). Additionally, in the last decade of the 20th century, prison education programs in the USA and European countries have been reduced in part, due to the rapid development of prisons, the frequent transfer of prisoners from one prison to another and the reduced state funding (Lawrence, Mears, Dubin, & Travis, 2002; Spangenberg, 2004; EC, 2011; Rand Corporation, 2014).

2. Barriers in prison education

This section refers to the barriers that arise in inmates' adult education, as well as to the challenges encountered by inmates' adult educators, according to the relevant bibliography.

2.1 Educational inequalities as a barrier to prison education

Many barriers arise in prison education from pre-existing educational inequalities experienced by prisoners as students in the formal education system (Vergidis, 2014). These have their starting point in the socio-economic level of prisoners (Social Inequality, n.d.), but also in the education system itself (Reducing inequalities, 2015). In other words, many of the barriers that arise in inmates' adult education are directly related to the inmates' negative experiences in the education system (Vergidis, 2014).

2.2 Incarceration conditions as a barrier to the inmates' education

Many barriers arise in the inmates' education from the prison conditions themselves (Tsimboukli & Phillips, 2010; Papaioannou, Anagnou, & Vergidis, 2016) and derive from the structure of prison. A fundamental challenge, then, is to reconcile the objectives of a "punitive" criminal system with the objectives of education (Bayliss, Brimecombe, Brimecombe & Pomeroy, 2008).

Muñoz (2009) identifies barriers to inmates' education in internal-dispositional or external (institutional-situational). Internal-dispositional barriers are related to the negative experiences of inmates before and during imprisonments, such as the effects of a disadvantaged childhood, previous educational failures, low self-esteem, drug, and alcohol abuse and learning disabilities. External barriers are related to the interruption of education due to prison administrators' decisions, or the abrupt transfer of inmates from one prison to another, to the lack of infrastructure (libraries, educators and educational material), lack access to information and internet technologies and to inadequate funding. Certainly, according to Chr Breivik (2010, as cited in Linardatou & Manousou, 2014), access to and use of the Internet in prisons is considered essential.

The European Commission (2011) also considers as the main barrier to the inmates' education the transfer of inmates between institutions, as well as the fact that the long duration of the sentence affects the inmates' educational path. Another inhibitory factor in the inmates' education is the pressure exerted on inmates wishing to attend a program by other inmates who consider that inmates' education is of no value (Brosens, De Donder, Vanwing, Dury, & Verté, 2013; Dixon and Mentor, 2005, as cited in Kabeta, 2017).

Other factors that impede the learning process in prisons, according to Kabeta (2017) are a) bureaucratic procedures of the prison, b) prison regulations, which do not allow the educators to bring the educational material they want within the prison area (c) prison regulations, which restrict the educators to take appropriate measures against inmates who are late in the course or interrupt it, (d) bad behavior and disobedience of the inmates and (e) harassment of woman educators.

2.3 The challenges of the work of the inmates' adult educator

The profession of inmates' educator is becoming more and more difficult (Carr, 2000) and indeed, the inmates' educator does not enjoy special professional recognition (Sayko, 2005). Carr (2001) mentions that the legal reality for inmates' educators in prisons is a risk factor for their lives but also for their careers.

Obviously, the challenges faced by inmates' adult educators stem from the barriers that the prison education itself has to overcome. Thus, pre-existing social and educational inequalities (Tsimboukli, 2008), which were mentioned in the previous chapter, create additional barriers to the effective implementation of the work of inmates' adult educators. Similarly, the internal-dispositional or external (institutional-situational) barriers (Muñoz, 2009), that are also mentioned in the previous chapter, directly concern inmates' adult educators.

In addition to the above barriers, the inmates' adult educator is called upon to overcome challenges due to his professional status and identity within the adversities of the dipole of correction and education. The research, therefore, highlights three types of barriers faced by inmates' educators: (a) barriers related to the Cultural Shock experienced in the prison environment, (b) barriers related to the educators' deficiencies in their knowledge and skills and (c) barriers resulting from the existential and philosophical crises the educators experience (DelliCarpini, 2008; Jurich, Casper & Hull, 2001).

As far as the Cultural Shock is concerned, according to Wright (2005a), inmates' adult educators are not trained and prepared for the Cultural Shock that they will experience within the prison environment. This Cultural Shock arises a) from the wrong perception of the educators themselves and the whole society of prisons and b)

from the management of the sub-culture of prisoners and prison staff, which is usually opposed to any different culture (of educators) trying to change the balance in the prison area (Patrie, 2017). Consequently, the challenge for inmates' adult educators to manage this Culture Shock seems to be fairly major.

Concerning the challenges of the work of inmates' adult educators, which result from the lack of knowledge and skills, Patrie (2017) states that these arise from the fact that the inmates' population is characterized by great heterogeneity. Thus, Patrie (2017) includes a list of the most significant deficiencies in knowledge and skills, those of communication, understanding of human behavior, and specialized teaching techniques. In addition, many educators are both unprepared and unskilled to cope with the education of inmates with learning disabilities, behavioral problems and physical disabilities (Kvarfordt, Purcell & Shannon, 2004, as cited in Ely, 2011). Inmates' adult educators also have difficulty in their work because they use established educational practices that are not effective in the context of prison education (Gehring & Wright, 2006; Desir & Whitehead, 2010). Furthermore, Ely (2011) underlines the need for training of inmates' educators, since many of them are not certified and even teach cognitive subjects without being trained in them.

Regarding existential and philosophical crises, Patrie (2017) highlights the challenge of inmates' adult educator to manage with both correctional and educational system. Therefore, inmates' adult educators should familiarize themselves with the system, which they do not know well, namely the correctional and they should have time to reflect on their practice and share it with other educators so that they can understand their experiences. Surveys also show that communication with other inmates' educators (DelliCarpini, 2008) and educational guidance by experienced mentor educators (Hurkmans & Gillijns, 2012) may seem quite useful.

Wright (2004) refers that inmates' educators usually suffer from an identity crisis due to the fact that they have to cope with a double role, that of the educator and that of the reformer of prisoners. Indeed, he states that the common burnout of inmates' educators is rooted in this internal ideological struggle that they experience, but also in the toxic culture of the prison itself (Wright, 2005b). In other words, the most important challenge of inmates' educators is to cope with the contradiction they experience in prison. This contradiction concerns the fact that the debilitating nature of the prison conflicts with the empowering role of educators (Nahmad-Williams, 2011; Shethar, 1993, as cited in WVAAdultED Program, 2018).

In addition, educators face the personal problems of their inmates, such as problems in their relationships, divorce, immigration, loss of loved ones, court issues, child custody, etc. (Wright & Gehring, 2008, as cited in Patrie, 2017).

Another challenge faced by inmates' adult educators is the evaluation of their work based on the rates of recidivism of their inmates (WVAAdultED Program, 2018). The fact that the concept of crime recidivism is indirect, very simple and has not been conceptually clarified, makes the rate of recidivism inappropriate to be an evaluating indicator for the work of the inmates' educator (WVAAdultED Program, 2018).

3. Second Chance Schools in Greek Prisons

There are currently 11 SCS in Greek prisons. More specifically, in 2004, the innovative institution of SCS was also introduced in prisons, and the first school operated in the Judicial Prisons of Larissa. Since 2005, SCS has been established in several prisons in the country, such as: Korydallos Attikis, Grevena, Trikala, Nigrita Serres, Diavata Thessaloniki, Patras, Eleonas Thebes, Domokos Fthiotida and Malandrino Fokidas. From 2016, the 2nd SCS of Chania city has been operated in the Agia prison (Crete).

Nevertheless, according to Anagnou and Vergidis (2008), although theoretically all SCS (inside and outside prisons) should be included in the strategy of social and professional development and social exclusion, this happens only with the case of SCS in prisons.

3.1 The SCS of Chania Prison

The SCS of Chania Prison is the 2nd SCS of Chania city and operates from 2016 at the General Detention Department "Crete I" in Agia town (Chania). Due to the recent startup of the school, the data for educators and inmates is not much. Thus, the students in the school year 2017-2018 were about 42 inmates in the two cycles of studies. Their age ranged from 19 to 60 years. Inmates of Chania Prison often transfer to Korydallos Prison in Athens.

4. Research methodology

This section presents the research methodology.

4.1 Research question

The research question was: What challenges do the inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison encounter in their work?

4.2 Research Method - Strategy - Research Tool

The data collection method was qualitative, because the purpose of the research is to investigate and understand a central theme (Creswell, 2011). The research strategy followed is a case study, since it concerns the inmates of a particular SCS, that of Chania Prison during the school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. According to Robson (2010), a case study is more a research strategy than a research method and focuses on a phenomenon in its context. This strategy was chosen, because the SCS educational framework and the prison environment are very important and also difficult to be accessed by the researcher (Yin, 2003).

According to Mason (2003), the data collection technique or better the data production technique was the semi-structured interview, a tool that enables the sequence of questions to be modified (Cohen & Manion, 1994), the choice of emphasis in the most essential aspects of each respondent (Fylan, 2005; Robson, 2010), but requires critical communication skills from the interviewer (Galletta, 2013). Therefore, this tool has been chosen as the most appropriate to highlight the views of the participants.

4.3 The participants in the survey

The participants of the survey were the inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison during the school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. All participants (convenience sampling) were 12 inmates' adult educators, 4 of whom worked in the SCS of Chania Prison during the school year 2016-2017, while 8 worked in the school year 2017-2018. These include the SCS Director and the Career Advisor. With regard to the work situation of the inmates' adult educators, 4 were permanent educators, 4 were hourly paid, and the rest 4 were volunteers. As for gender, 3 educators were men and 9 women. The age of the participants ranged from 33 to 58. Undoubtedly, the participants in this survey do not represent the entire population of adult inmates of SCS in Greece, and consequently, the research results are not generalizable.

4.4 Data analysis method

Content analysis was used as the method of analyzing the data resulting from interviews. In the thematic analysis, the focus is on concepts, meanings, or themes, which refer to the phenomenon under study and how it is perceived by the participants in the research (Tzani, 2005). Also, the content analysis includes the process of locating, coding, and categorizing complex and often contradictory data (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 2014). Furthermore, the thematic content analysis allows quantification of the results (Trowler, 1996; Vamvoukas, 2002), which was attempted in this research.

5. Results

This section presents the results of the survey. The following Table summarizes the main challenges faced by educators and the frequency of their reports.

Table 1. The main challenges encountered by the educators of the Second Chance School in Chania Prison (school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018)

Challenge Category	Frequency of reports
Incarceration	9
Practical issues	6
Handling psychologically impaired individuals	3
Motivation of inmates-trainees	3
Heterogeneity of the inmates group	3
Lack of experience of inmates' educators	3

Handling behavior of inmates	2
Incorrect / "old" perceptions of inmates for education	2
Conflicts between inmates	2
Learning disabilities	1
Balance between education and prison system	1
N=12	

The most common reference to the main challenges faced by educators is generally related to the context of prison and the situation of imprisonment. Typical is the Inmates' Educator 4 (IE4) response, which describes the context of the prison as a battleground and absolute survival: *"[...] the people are prisoners. They live in a combat environment within the radius. [...] So [...] in the radius they live in a regime of terror, exploitation, bullying. Essentially, it is the ultimate survival. This, prisoner, will bring it to school and try to take advantage of it."*

Other major challenges encountered by the educators of the Second Chance School of Chania Prison concern practical issues which can be categorized in: a) the restrictions on the use of materials, b) the prohibition of the use of the Internet, c) the lack of infrastructure, d) the filming of the lesson for safety reasons and e) the way of organizing life of inmates. As regards restrictions on the use of materials, IE1 stresses that: *"Materials are missing infrastructure is missing [...]"*. Similarly, the IE12 underlines that: *"Most things are not allowed, we must take special licenses to bring various objects that are useful."* Regarding the use of the Internet, the IE9 states that: *"The lack of technology makes things difficult. [...]"*. Regarding the lack of infrastructure, the IE4 states that: *"There is a need for separate facilities for a school in prison."* For IE10, a major barrier is the existence of cameras within the school space. Finally, for IE5: *"The way of life of the prisoners makes learning very difficult, [...] they cannot wake up in the morning because they sleep late at night for their own reasons."*

Furthermore, IE4 mentions that the main challenge is to manage his psychologically impaired students *"... the handling you are doing to a person who is already depressed, especially psychologically, to take him with you."* In addition, the burden on the educators themselves arising from the prison context is also very important. As the IE10 says: *"[...] It is a beautiful school, but I had to go through ten locked iron doors with rails. It is depressing the landscape of the prison."* At the same time, the IE5 states that: *"You are afraid that [...] they will steal a pen, [...] an object that we do not know how they are going to use it [...]"*.

Also, the IE6 considers that: *"The majority goes to school because there are wages, that is, reducing the penalty as an incentive for all."* The IE6 states that: *"[...] the most problematic is the interview given by the inmates to be chosen as students."*

Another important barrier to the proper conduct of the educational process is the failure to keep the limits. Typical is the IE3 response: *"It is about overcoming the limits. [...] The limits are important because mainly the inmates can overcome them, they can manipulate us a little [...]"*.

In addition, IE4 states that *"[...] as you understand that you are dealing with people who may be from very poor ... or very young people."* Indeed, the IE8 also underlines the heterogeneity of language use and nationality: *"Another challenge is the language itself, as these guys are not educated in many cases or they are foreign people."*

Further barriers arise for the inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison from the incorrect or "old" perceptions of their students about the model of the educator and about the school itself. The IE5 clarifies that: *"The challenges are the resistance that prisoners themselves have in relation to school [...] in their earlier perceptions of school and of all."*

Additional challenges mentioned by the educators concern the conflicts between inmates and the inability of educators to manage them. Thus, IE10 refers to the prison hierarchy: *"The Cretan Greeks are the dominant group. There are the Albanians. There are some..., who are ... hierarchically lower. [...] There are hierarchies inside."*

Also, one educator (IE11) refers to the learning disabilities of the inmates *"they have many learning disabilities, often undetected [...]"* and only one educator (IE4) points out the challenge that educators of the SCS of Chania Prison every day encounter to balance between the education and the prison system *"from the one hand [...] it is*

the prison [...] where people are in constraint as a consequence of their actions [...] On the other hand there has to be teaching, [...] There, in prison, this is a problem, because the balance is delicate. "

Finally, IE2 states that: *"Anyone should attend seminars, that is, even about how to stand. A man, for example, in women's prisons or a woman respectively in men's prisons [...]"*.

Below are the conclusions of the survey.

6. Conclusions

This section summarizes the main findings of the survey.

The challenges encountered by inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison derive mainly from:

- a) The context of the prison and the situation of imprisonment (9 out of 12),
- b) Practical issues that can be categorized in:
 - b.1. The restrictions on the use of materials,
 - b.2. The prohibition of the use of the Internet,
 - b.3. The lack of infrastructure,
 - b.4. The filming of the course for safety reasons,
 - b.5. The way of organizing the life of inmates (6 out of 12),
- c) Handling psychologically impaired individuals (3 out of 12),
- d) The motivation of the inmates-trainees for their attendance in the Second Chance School of Chania Prison (3 out of 12),
- e) The heterogeneity of the prison population (3 out of 12),
- f) The lack of experience and training of educators (3 out of 12).

Less often, challenges are encountered concerning a) the behavior of the inmates-trainees, b) the incorrect or "old" perceptions of the inmates-trainees about the model of the educator and about the school itself, c) the conflicts between inmates-trainees, d) learning disabilities of inmates-trainees and e) the difficulty of maintaining the balance between the education and the prison system.

In conclusion, the challenges encountered by inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison can be categorized into challenges arising from:

- a) The restrictive environment of the prison at a psychological level. These have been highlighted by many other researchers (Wright, 2004; DelliCarpini, 2008; Muñoz, 2009; Tsimboukli & Phillips, 2010; Lekaditi, 2012; Zygogianni, 2014; Touloumi, 2016; Papaioannou, Anagnou, & Vergidis, 2016),
- b) The restrictive environment of the prison at a practical level. These mainly correspond to the external (institutional-situational) barriers (Muñoz, 2009) and many challenges have been identified in restrictions on the use of materials, the prohibition of the internet use and the lack of infrastructure (Lekaditi, 2012),
- c) The group of inmates-trainees (motivation / interviewing process, not keeping the limits, heterogeneity, attitudes towards school, conflicts, learning disabilities). These correspond to Muñoz's internal-dispositional barriers (2009), to the previous negative educational experiences of the inmates (Vergidis, 2014) and to the challenge of inmates' management by the educators (Patrie, 2017). Such barriers have also been identified and confirmed by the surveys of Lekaditi (2012), Zygogianni (2014), Touloumi (2016) and Papaioannou, Anagnou, and Vergidis (2016),
- d) The characteristics of educators (lack of experience, lack of training). These focus on the inmates' adult educators of the SCS of Chania Prison and their deficiencies. These have already been reported by researchers (Jurich, Casper & Hull, 2001; Gehring & Wright, 2006; DelliCarpini, 2008; Lekaditi, 2012; Patrie, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that the challenge of inmates' adult educators to manage the two systems, the correctional and the educational, which has been found by several researchers (Wright, 2004; Nahmad-Williams, 2011; Patrie, 2017; Shethar, as cited in WVAdultED Program, 2018) was recorded only by one participant in the present survey. Still, no educator was referred to the professional burnout, as a barrier, as reported by Wright (2005b). Finally, the educators of the SCS of Chania Prison did not report challenges arising from the evaluation of their work based on the rates of crime recidivism (WVAdultED Program, 2018), probably because there was

no such evaluation in Greek Second Chance Schools operating in prisons. The inmates' adult education is a complex, demanding, and challenging task for the inmates' educators. The very careful design of both relevant programs and the education of their educators is a prerequisite for its effective implementation.

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