The Effects of Vocational Education on Recidivism

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Research Methods

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Abstract

This research explored vocational education programs in correctional facilities and examined the positive effects that it has on recidivism rates. This study draws upon research previously conducted to support the hypothesis. This study uses quantitative and qualitative research techniques to better understand the experiences that individuals encounter in vocational programs while incarcerated and following release. Research was conducted at the state level, involving formerly and currently incarcerated individuals in the state of Oregon. 75 male and 75 female participants that fall within these four groups were chosen and sent surveys inquiring about their participation in vocational programs for the quantitative portion of the research. For the qualitative portion of the research, 4 focus groups of 8-10 participants were conducted and asked about personal experiences regarding vocational education; pre and post release. The insights gained from the data collected suggested ways that vocational education programs could be improved upon and expanded into various correctional facilities in order to reduce recidivism rates.
Introduction

Recidivism is a current issue in the nation. Recidivism is also an area of concern for social workers as it is an area that affects vulnerable populations such as people that were previously incarcerated who face the risk of going back into the prison system. It also seems that offenders of any type of crime have more likelihood of being back in prison rather than succeeding outside of the prison system. According to Bowman and Travis Jr. (2012), reentry (the incarcerated integrating back to the community) comes with its own issues. According to the authors, reentry is associated with adversity in terms of looking at social outcomes such as poor health and wellbeing, then work and substance abuse problems, and even death (Bowman & Travis Jr, 2012, p.9). Bowman and Travis Jr. (2012), explore some theoretical explanations on why people recidivate such as dysfunctional personal attributes and a person is less amiable to change; others, include lack of positive attachment to supports and the stigma associated with being imprisoned that deny the opportunity to succeed and foster even more scrutiny (p.10).

Recidivism can be used as an argument, that deterrence theory does not work. Deterrence theory is the idea of criminal behavior decreasing through incarceration and the amount of time spent incarcerated due to the type of crime. While deterrence theory is used by the current criminal justice system and is seen to be the “status quo”, then why are the rates of recidivism at a high rate. According to Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014) of 404,638 state prisoners released in 2005, 67.8 percent were arrested within three years of release. It should also be added that about half of those arrested again either had a parole/probation violation or were arrested for a new offense.
This raises questions of why this is happening. Why are the previously incarcerated falling back into previous criminal behavior, although deterrence theory supposedly works? Is the issue of recidivism a personal problem or a problem of society? Is it discrimination; are the previously incarcerated not receiving enough outside support? Numerous questions can be asked and numerous answers can be provided. Although this paper can delve into the multiple factors that play in the issue of recidivism, due to time and to narrow the subject matter, the researchers have decided to look into how education has an impact on recidivism and whether it can play a role in these rates. The researchers will analyze articles and look into the effect of education experience in the prison system.

The research conducted in this paper will be using a mixed methods design of the quantitative framework and the qualitative framework. The reasoning behind using the mixed methods design is to gather a deeper understanding of the issue of recidivism that can be explained through data and observations. Both these methods when used correctly can clarify and elaborate to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue of recidivism and relapse rates in the country.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed methods study, meaning that the researchers will be using both a quantitative and qualitative research methodology of analyzing data and asking questions to people previously incarcerated. The mixed methods also serve to understand the impact of vocational certification on recidivism as it relates to Oregon Correctional Facilities. For the research in this paper, recidivism will be defined as a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.
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Therefore, the person would have to have been in a correctional facility in their previous history prior to going back to count as recidivism. Recidivism is also criminal acts that turn to rearrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a 3 year period following the prisoner's release ("Recidivism | National Institute of Justice", 2014). However, for the purpose of the study, the researchers will be looking at the five year rate of recidivism as it seems that as the more time goes on the more of a likelihood to recidivate.

**Quantitative Conceptual Framework**

As part of the quantitative conceptual framework, the researchers hypothesize that educational experience has an effect on the rates of recidivism of people who were previously incarcerated and relapsed. The Independent Variable (IV) in this study will be educational experience in the prison system. For the purpose of this study, educational experience will be defined as the vocational learning and certification that is offered in Oregon Correctional Facilities. The Dependent Variable (DV) in this study will be defined as recidivism. Recidivism in this paper will be defined as a relapse of criminal behavior within 5 years since previous incarceration.

**Hypothesis**

The researchers hypothesize that the effect educational experiences will reduce the rates of recidivism. In detail, it is believed that vocational education provided in the prison system and correctional facilities will have an effect on lowering the rates of recidivism of people previously incarcerated. The reasoning behind this hypothesis is the opinion that vocational education provides a hands-on education and experience that is required for manual jobs that a certification or degree would not offer.
Qualitative Conceptual Framework

The qualitative structure of this study seeks to answer the following questions: How do inmates experience these educational programs? Do they find them helpful? How are they impacted by the vocational programs? How could these vocational programs be improved from an inmate perspective?

Description of Qualitative Research

The qualitative research will consist of 5 interview groups: the first group will have participants that have not recidivate following completion of the program and release from prison; the second group will consist of people who have recidivated without the program; the third group will have participants that are not currently released from prison, have a first time offense, and are in the program; and lastly, the fourth group will have participants that are currently not released from prison, have a first time offense, but are not in a vocational setting. These interview groups will consist of 8-10 participants per group and will be facilitated by an interviewer that was formerly incarcerated.

Significance and Potential Utility of this Study

As stated in the introduction, recidivism is a huge problem in the United States. In order to for this problem to be addressed and recidivism rates to decrease, potential solutions to this problem must be explored to see what will be effective. While looking into the effectiveness of vocational training programs within prisons to reduce recidivism is an important step in the overall solution, it is certainly not the only step. There are many potential solutions that should be explored alongside vocational educational programs in prison, such as post-prison housing programs. Therefore this study does not intend to determine if vocational education within
prisons is the solution to recidivism rates, but rather to determine if it is one part of an overall solution, recognizing that there are many different factors that can work together to contribute to reducing recidivism (Hall, Wooten, & Lundgren, 2016).

**Need for Research**

One important aspect of this research is location, as it will take place in Oregon. Because every state in the United States operates their own criminal justice system, apart from the Federal Criminal Justice System which operates throughout the country, each state’s criminal justice system has the potential to operate differently and have different attributes that affect their recidivism rates. While there have been a number of research studies that we have found, these take place in other states. By focusing on Oregon, we will be able to examine how vocational educational programs affect recidivism rates specifically within the context of the Oregon Criminal Justice System, as well as identify any unique aspects of the Oregon Criminal Justice system which might affect the results. At the same time, we also hope that this study will contribute the existing literature by serving as another local study that will either confirm or contradict the results of existing similar studies, thereby having the potential to add strength to the conclusions of existing research.

An additional important attribute of our study is that it is a mixed methods study, compared to a number of other studies which were either strictly quantitative or qualitative in nature. By combining the strengths of both of these methods, this study will contribute to the literature on this topic in a new way, not confined by the narrower approach of only one of the methods, and potentially provide fresh insights.

**Intended Goal**
The ultimate goal of this study is to reduce recidivism in Oregon as well as nationally. Because our study focuses on people who have been incarcerated within the criminal justice system in Oregon, we hope that correctional officials and policy makers in Oregon will take this study into account when considering funding levels for vocational programs. If our hypothesis is proved to be correct we hope these Oregon correctional officials and policy makers will respond by creating more vocational educational opportunities for those incarcerated within the Oregon correctional system. We also hope that correctional officials and policy makers in other states will look at this study along with the existing research and if this hypothesis proves correct will implement additional vocational education programs for those in their correctional institutions.

**Literature Review**

**Critical Evaluation of Articles**

In a special report made by Durose, Cooper and Snyder (2014) for the U.S Department of Justice the researchers looked at the patterns of recidivism of the previously incarcerated from 2005 to 2010. Durose, Cooper and Snyder spent time analyzing statistics from 30 states having to do with looking at the perspectives of those who were former prisoners who had been released. What these statisticians found was that among the 404,638 prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states, 67.8 percent were rearrested within 3 years of release. When adding another 2 years (i.e., 5 years after release), the percentage jumped to a much higher 76.6 percent rearrested.

Additionally, 49.7 percent had either parole/probation violation or were arrested for a new offense within 3 years; it jumped to 55.1 percent when analyzing within 5 years of release (p.1). Durose, Cooper and Snyder also added that the Bureau of Justice Statistics uses recidivism reports for 3 years following release, while the researchers used a 5 year analyses to look at data
from 30 states. The researchers were also able to analyze data from 1994 as a comparison to those released in 2005. What they found was that there was an increase in the percentage of those being rearrested for a completely new crime within the 3 years of release; of those released in 1994, the percentage was at 66.9% compared to a significantly higher 71.6% released in 2005. According to the researchers this meant that approximately 3 in 4 state prisoners were rearrested in 5 years.

In a study by Sedgley, Scott, Williams and Derrick (2008), looks at how education or job programmes affect recidivism. According to the researchers, decreasing the rates of recidivism is critical as there is an increasing trend in prison population and the cost. Just like how Durose, Cooper and Snyder (2014) were able to show through their data of the increase in prison rates, Sedgley and et. al (2008), states that average annual growth rate between 2000 and 2005 was at a rate of 1.9%. Additionally, have legislation and the odds stacked against them, such as the ‘three strikes’ legislation in which repeat offenders are being incarcerated for longer periods of time.

In a majority of the literature there are two possible causes of incarceration and recidivism and those are 1) lack of job skills and 2) lack of education. Sedgley and et al (2008), used 4515 males formerly incarcerated in the Ohio prison system that were released in 1992. The study used participants that served at least one year minimum to guarantee that they could have benefited from work or education programs. What they found in the study was that out of 4515 participants sampled 88.75% had prison jobs, 45.2% participated in an education program, and 9.0% did not participate in either.

The results were rather interesting as it showed that of those who participated in a program, 30.4 to 35% recidivated within the first 3 years and 46-50.6% did within the 10 years.
However, of the 9.0% of the incarcerated who did not participate in either a work or education program, 64.8% recidivated within 3 years and 73.7% recidivated within 10 years. This kind of result suggests that there is an influence of the work and education programs in the prison system.

A study by Grant Duwe (2012) evaluated the productiveness of EMPLOY, a reentry employment program that aids in preparation for employment following release and provides community support for a full year following release for formerly and currently incarcerated individuals. The study examined recidivism and employment, from 2006 to 2008, following release amongst 464 formerly incarcerated individuals from Minnesota correctional facilities. With the average follow up period for participants being 28 months, the outcome data was collected from the individuals up until June 2010 by comparing recidivism and post-release employment outcomes. Of the 232 participants of the program, 65 participants completed the program, 43 participants successfully participated in the program until the end of their sentence, and the other 124 participants dropped out of the program. 49 participants dropped out of the program prior to their release from prison and the other 75 participants dropped out post release into the community.

Compared with those that did not participate in the EMPLOY program, those in the program were less likely to recidivate, had a likelier chance of employment upon release, and earned more total wages with a greater number of hours worked. Following the data regarding post release employment, at 91%, those that completed the program produced the highest rate of employment. This was followed closely by the 81% of those that had successfully participated in the program until they were released. Those that had participated in the EMPLOY program were
discovered to earn more total wages than those in the comparison group. Those that had participated were more likely to find employment and more likely to work more hours.

In an study by Tripodi, Kim, and Bender (2009), the association between employment and recidivism amongst 250 male parolees released from Texas prisons was evaluated from a random sample of administrative data from correctional facilities from 2001 to 2005. Since the parolees in the random sample were released from prison at different times during a 4-year period, the authors selected a Cox proportional hazard modeling as an appropriate strategy. The first Cox model analyzes employment and how it influences recidivism while also taking in account of time from when the offenders were released from prison. 59 cases from the study were reincarcerated and 190 cases were not reincarcerated at the time of data collection. The second Cox model tested the hypothesis that those that have recidivated and gain employment following release from prison will stay crime free longer within the community before reoffending than recidivists that do not find employment. Although the study had not reached notable statistical levels, a 17% reduction was associated with obtaining employment upon release from a correctional facility, in comparison to those that were formerly incarcerated and unable to find employment upon release. Overall, the results generally support the outlook that although obtaining employment is not directly associated with a substantial decrease in recidivism, it is associated with a delay in re-incarceration.

The research conducted in Richmond (2014) is a qualitative analysis of the experiences of those incarcerated in prison work programs. The research showed that while those incarcerated had an overall positive perception of their experiences in the work program, many did not feel the programs provided enough specialized training and technical skills to be
The effects of vocational education on recidivism when applying for jobs upon release, especially given the stigma associated with their convictions. Still, many participants in this study described feeling that their experience working in the program was positive and taught them skills related to perseverance and working with others. The research conducted in Richmond (2014) is a qualitative analysis of the experiences of those incarcerated in prison work programs. The research showed that while those incarcerated had an overall positive perception of their experiences in the work program, many did not feel the programs provided enough specialized training and technical skills to be competitive when applying for jobs upon release, especially given the stigma associated with their convictions. Still, many participants in this study described feeling that their experience working in the program was positive and taught them skills related to perseverance and working with others.

In Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro (2018) the study is a qualitative analysis of a prison work program for those who are incarcerated and enrolled in a program in Italy in which women who are incarcerated work for a private company within the prison. A key component of the study was interviewing a total of 49 people, including prison officials and women who were incarcerated and participating in the employment program. Of the 49 participants, 12 were women who were participating in this program. The study concluded that women in this program benefited from the work program on multiple levels, including having a secure environment to spend time in, as well as women in the program forming positive and supportive relationships with each other and the women in the program developing more self-esteem as a result of their participation in the program. Although there was not extensive data on recidivism as it relates to this program, what data there was indicates that program participants who had left
the program experienced recidivism at a much lower rate from the overall population of Italians released from incarceration.

In Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle (2014), a quantitative approach was taken to examine the prison population in the Australian state of Victoria. The study examined 600 participants in a correctional education program in Victoria that participated in an employment program that provided vocational training, as well as support in obtaining employment and staying employed. Through examining their rates of recidivism, the study was able to show that those who participated in the program had higher employment rates and lower rates of recidivism than the overall population of those incarcerated, upon their release.

**Theoretical Background**

The theoretical background we are taking on this is one rooted in the person in the ecosystems perspective, which is a perspective which “examines the exchanges between individuals, families, groups, and communities and their environment” (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2017, P. 25). We realize that everyone is affected by their many different experiences, their social environments and supports, and many different aspects of their life and the environment and systems they live in. All areas of our life and the various environments we live in and have lived in previously combine to help make us the people we are and to shape the people we will become.

From the viewpoint of the ecosystems perspective “the person is a system within a larger system” (Van Wormer, 2017, P. 30). With this in mind we recognize that those experiencing incarceration and those released from incarceration, exist within systems that often present unique challenges and can negatively affect their well-being. In the same way, we hold the view
that there are things that there are steps that can be taken to help improve the ecosystems of those experiencing incarceration and those recently released from incarceration live in, and thereby increase their chances of avoiding recidivism (Hall, Wooten, & Lundgren, 2016).

For those who are experiencing or have experienced incarceration, employment and vocational preparedness are an important aspect of their overall social success and well-being, providing the potential for a stable source of income upon release from prison that can be used to pay for basic necessities such as housing (Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro 2018). At the same time, employment and vocational training both within prison and after prison have the potential to offer current and former inmates important emotional supports and systems of support that can contribute to their overall well-being that they potentially would not have if they were unemployed.

The studies we looked at use a variety of theoretical backgrounds. The theoretical method taken in Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro (2018) is to use “an abductive, grounded-theory approach” (p. 6). In Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle (2014) there is a theoretical assumption that employment is an important aspect of the reintegration back into society of those released from incarceration, even as there are many barriers to employment facing those released from incarceration. This particular theoretical framework is very compatible with our ecosystems perspective and seem to share many of the same assumptions.

**Findings From Literature Review**

The findings of the the literature review consistently shows that vocational education within prisons have a positive impact on prisoner self-perception and reduce the rates of recidivism. For instance, Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle (2014) suggested a lower recidivism
rate for those who participated in vocational training. Likewise in Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro (2018) participants in a vocational program were found to have a higher level of self-esteem, and the limited data available indicated a lower recidivism rate. Further, the study in Richmond (2014) found that many participants described positive changes in their self-perception related to their vocational program. In Tripodi, Kim, and Bender (2009) there was a general indication that obtaining employment after being released from prison reduced recidivism. The research conducted by Grant Duwe (2012) found that participants of the EMPLOY vocational program had a lower rated of recidivating and higher employment rates than non-participants. Finally, Sedgley, Scott, Williams and Derrick (2008) showed that study participants who had participated in a prison work or education program were around half as likely to recidivate within three years from their release from prison as those who had not participated in a prison education or work program while incarcerated.

**Gaps in the Literature**

A gap that was found in the Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014) study was that although there was a lot of data on the rate of recidivism and the increase of those rates from 1994 to 2005, the statistics and the rates of recidivism were not specific on which 30 states it concentrated on. There was also no data on specific states, especially data on the state of Oregon which the researchers decided to focus for this paper. Another gap found is that the literature does not explain the reasons why recidivism is still happening. The research article does not provide any explanation or a solution to the issue of recidivism.

The gap in the Sedgley, Scott, Williams and Derrick (2008) was that it used 4515 male participants in the study. While recidivism does affect a diverse population of people, the
researchers decided to only use males from Ohio state. The study also did not specify why these 4515 participants were selected. A study sample should be truly representative of the sample population size and inclusive. The study should have included women and other representative data such as age range, race and ethnicity, and type of criminality the participants got in trouble for participating in. It would have also been beneficial if the researcher would also have distinguished between the type of education received that looked or correlated with what would have been more beneficial.

Some of the limitations in Duwe’s (2012) study is the lack of information regarding employment history prior to incarceration. The participants of the EMPLOY program may have had more substantial work histories than those in the comparison group. The findings obtained for post release employment may be due to this difference rather than to the effects of the program itself.

One of the limitations for the article by Tripodi, Kim, and Bender (2009), is the lack of information regarding substance use history and mental health history for those that were formerly incarcerated and if there is an underlying correlation between substance use, mental health, and recidivism. The second limitation is the sample size of 250 formerly incarcerated individuals to be quite small in comparison with the population of Texas offenders released from prison between 2001 to 2005.

In Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro (2018) a gap is that it takes place not in the United States, but in Europe. An issue with the study could also be seen in that a majority of the people interviewed were not program participants, but correctional officials, and this could potentially leave the study open for biased viewpoints about the experience of the women
participating in the program since so much of the information was not coming from them directly. Additionally, a weakness in this study as it relates to recidivism is that it does not look extensively at the questions of recidivism extensively, although it does provide some limited data in this area. Finally, another weakness in this article is that it does not look directly at prison vocational programs leading to a vocational certificate, but instead at a vocational work program.

A couple of potential weaknesses in Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle (2014) as it relates to our research is that it also takes place outside of the United States and as such there is the potential for the results to be different because of differences in how the prison system operates in Australia. Additionally, because the study focused on a program that not only provided vocational training, but also provided intensive support in finding and maintaining employment, it is possible that the beneficial outcomes are related more with the employment support than with the vocational training itself.

A weakness in Richmond (2014) is that it examines vocational training, and jobs programs within programs, but not programs that necessarily lead to a vocational certificate that could be used by those incarcerated upon their release. Also, because it is only qualitative research it does not contain quantitative data related to the percentages of those who participated in vocational programs that recidivated, versus those of the general population of those incarcerated.

Methodology

This Literature Review was conducted using online search engines such as Academic Search Premier and ProQuest’s Social Science Database. Terms searched for included vocational, education, and recidivism. When determining which articles to use, we looked for
how relevant an article was to our purpose statement, as well as how recent the research was conducted, with priority given to research completed within the last five years. Although most of the articles selected were based on research within the United States, two of the studies were based outside of the United States with one being conducted in Australia (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle 2014) and the other in Italy (Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro, 2018). The article from Italy was selected because of the importance of the study looking at the experience of women in prison work programs, and even though it is out of the context of the United States, it was one of the most recent studies we could find looking exclusively at women (Mongelli, Versari, Rullani, & Vaccaro, 2018). Some of the research the articles present was conducted through quantitative research, some through qualitative research, and some of the articles contain a mix of quantitative and qualitative research.

**Quantitative Research Method**

For this research, the purpose of the quantitative research method is to look at whether educational experience, specifically looking at vocational education, in prison has an effect on the recidivism rates for people. A quantitative research method can also help look at a comparison of those who received education compared to those who did not receive education in prison. The quantitative research method also serves to prove and back up that education has a positive effect on recidivism through a lower likelihood to recidivate.

The question that we ask for the purpose of this research and which serves as the basis of the research, is whether educational experience (vocational education and certification) would have a positive effect on lowering the rates of recidivism. Therefore, our independent variable (IV) will be the educational experience and the dependent variable (DV) will be recidivism;
additionally, the DV will be how the rates of recidivism are affected by education or the lack of education.

**Sampling Method**

For our sampling method, we will include four groups of people, with each sample group consisting of 150 participants. The first group will be participants who are incarcerated in Oregon Department of Corrections prisons for whom it is their first time in Department of Corrections custody. The second group of participants will consist of people who are incarcerated within Oregon Department of Corrections prisons who had previously been in Department of Corrections custody and had recidivated within five years of the last time they were released from custody. The third group will consist of individuals released from Oregon Department of Corrections custody within the last five years and who spent a year or more incarcerated. The final group will include individuals released from an Oregon Department of Corrections prison within five to ten years prior to the survey; we will classify this group as having successfully avoided recidivism.

Regardless of the actual gender ratio of the prison population in Oregon, we will work with the Oregon Department of Corrections to select approximately 75 people who identify as male from each of the four groups and 75 people who identify as female from each group. We are doing this because we feel gender differences are very important to study in relation to vocational education and prison recidivism, as well as the fact that women have been excluded from some of the previous studies in this area. In selecting participants based on gender we will
be relying on how those who are incarcerated self-identify regardless of whether they are in a men’s prison or women’s prison, recognizing that they, not the Department of Corrections, are the experts on their own life.

We also recognize that not everyone identifies as either male or female, so we will make sure no one is excluded from this research due to a non-binary gender identity. As social work researchers we feel it is ethically imperative for us to ensure that that we are inclusive of all people regardless of their gender identity. For the purposes of facilitating this inclusiveness in the random selection of participants, those who do not self-identify as male or female will be put into both the pools to be randomly selected from both data sets of people who identify as men and women; in this way, they will have a greater chance of being selected to participate in the study. Here again we want to do everything we can to facilitate people with diverse backgrounds being selected, as we believe that not only will this provide our data with a more complete perspective, but also that as social work researchers we have an ethical mandate to do so.

Although people who identify as gender non-binary will be put into both pools, at no point will someone be selected twice and sent two surveys; rather, they will be sent the survey from which their name was pulled first.

We will work with the Department of Corrections to select participants using a computer program which will select individuals at random based on the above categories and genders. For those currently incarcerated, we will select people from each category randomly from all the prison facilities operated by the Oregon Department of Corrections. Those who have been
released will be randomly selected from throughout the state of Oregon, using Department of Corrections records.

**Data Collection Process**

Once we work with the Oregon Department of Corrections to identify potential research subjects in all four of the groups, we will mail letters to all the research participants; this will include our survey as well as self-addressed envelopes with pre-paid postage. For those who are currently incarcerated, we will work with officials at the Oregon Department of Corrections to ensure the envelopes be given the same confidential status as letters inmates write to their attorneys; in this way, they will not be subject to the same review by correctional officials that ordinary inmate correspondence is subjected to. Those currently incarcerated will have their letters mailed to their mailboxes in the current correctional institutions they are residing in.

Those who are not currently incarcerated will have the surveys mailed to their addresses on record. They will be given the option to complete the survey online at a web address we provide them; this will be a secure website. They will also have the option to complete the survey on paper and mail it back with an included prepaid envelope. Those currently incarcerated will not be given the option to complete the surveys on the internet due to the internet restrictions imposed by the Oregon Department of Corrections. For both groups we will include a toll-free hotline where they may call to speak with one of our researchers if they have questions or need help completing the survey; we will train staff on how to clarify each of the questions in a consistent way without leading participants to answer in any specific way.
The letter explaining the survey will indicate that they have two months from the date the letter is mailed to complete the survey. After the first month has gone by, follow-up reminders will be sent to those selected to participate but who have not yet responded; we will send additional surveys and return envelopes with these reminder letters. We will make it clear that in no way will not answering the questions harm them in any way or subject them to any discipline from the Department of Corrections. We will also inform potential participants that if they choose to respond to the survey, their individual responses will not be shared with the Oregon Department of Corrections even though we are working with the Department of Corrections to facilitate our research. Further, we will let participants know that we will do everything we can to maintain their confidentiality and advise them to be discreet as possible to in participating in the survey; we will ensure that every prison facility involved reserve a private room that can be used to complete the survey responses away from the view of other inmates and corrections officials.

To incentivize the completion of the surveys so as to get as high of a response rate as possible, we will offer minor incentives to those who complete the survey. However, we are taking care to not offer any compensation that, per the context of our participants, would make them feel compelled to complete the survey because it would be hard for them to turn down such a large incentive. As such, we are offering those currently incarcerated a $5.00 credit to be deposited into their prison commissary accounts within one month of them returning the survey, an amount that we believe is enough so they could purchase a small snack such as chips or a
candy bar, but not so much that they will feel they cannot pass it up if they do not wish to participate. Similarly, those who have been released from incarceration will be offered a minor incentive of a voucher for a foot-long sub at Subway should they complete and submit the survey. Again, we chose this incentive because we wanted to provide something to encourage their participation in the survey while at the same time not providing so much compensation that they feel unfairly compelled to participate in the survey because of the level of compensation being offered.

Data Collection Instrument

There were considerations by the researchers of what will be used an assessment for the quantitative research method aspect of this paper. There were many other techniques that could have been used to collect data for this research, such as looking at previous studies conducted in Oregon about the issue of recidivism and looking at a correlation between education provided at certain facilities compared to another and the levels of recidivism. As a matter of fact, that could have been the sole foundation of the research.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research there needed to be an instrument identified in order to survey our chosen population for this study. During the process of searching for a specific instrument, there were many assessments that have come up during the search of a specific assessment that would tie-in education and recidivism. There were assessments, such as the General Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale [(G)SIR] developed by Joan Nuffield, that looked specifically at the issue of recidivism and ‘predicting’ recidivism among those released in the Canadian prison system (Nafehk & Motiuk, 2002). This scale looked at 15 items using a Likert-scale, such as age of first crime, type of crime, age, and job at the time of arrest,
etc; nevertheless, none of the questions had to do with, or were related to, education and how it affects recidivism. It would have benefited this research if the questions in the survey look at level of education at the time of arrest or the type of education received in a correctional facility. An example of the questions is attached in Appendix B.

However, there were issues with the (G)SIR and its ability to ‘predict’ recidivism. According to Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta (1995), the (G)SIR is an invalid measure to be looking at recidivism rates because it does not take into account the different factors that account for and influence criminal behaviors. Their study looked at rates with incarcerated women and what seemed like ‘predicting’ their chances of recidivism. They brought up some important issues such as not looking at other factors that affect recidivism. It also caused an issue with even suggesting that this survey will be used, because of the questioning around the issue of recidivism as it seems to not be based on strengths theory and looking at the individual ‘weaknesses’.

Another questionnaire found that would have a benefit to this research is the Self-Appraisal Questionnaire for predicting violent and non-violent recidivism (SAQ). This assessment will need to be further researched as it was not available to the general public without having to put forth some financial resources in order to get a thorough explanation on how to conduct and analyze the data collected from this assessment. However, with the little information gathered about the SAQ, it also does not look specifically at the issue of education and how it influences recidivism.

The SAQ cannot be disregarded because there is a lack of access to the information; it can provide useful data to this research. The assessment looks at approximately 50 items; 39
having to do with Risks and Needs, while 11 look at Strengths. These questions look at things such as age, relationship with peers, employment, offenses, history of violent behavior, marital factors and attachment, etc. An example is provided in Appendix C.

Quantitative Data Analysis

As mentioned before these two assessments do not have questions specifically relating to educational experiences whether in the prison system or outside of that system. For the purpose of this paper, these questions will have to be modified in order to make it fit for this study. The analyses of these two research instruments will have to use the data gathering of the original intentions of the creators of such assessments. However, there will have to be further thought and consideration on how a modification of these questions to take into account the effects of education will skew the measurements that are collected.

Nevertheless, for this study we do hope to use an explorative method when using the quantitative approach in order to determine the effectiveness of vocational education on recidivism in the state of Oregon. We do not predict a direct causation of education meaning that because of education received in correctional facilities, the levels of recidivism will go down. It is important to take into account other factors as well that have an effect of lowering recidivism rates. Vocational education can be, and after the research conducted, another factor in lowering recidivism. We expect from a team of experts to collect the data to be able to transcript the results from our groups and to see how we interpret the instruments after modifying them for our purposes.
Qualitative Research Method

For this research, the purpose of the qualitative research process is to conduct group interviews of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals on the effects of vocational education programs in correctional facilities on recidivism. The qualitative research process will consist of a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer will be asking 12 key questions and a co-facilitator who will record the data. A qualitative research method can help to provide a deeper understanding of the effects that vocational education has on formerly incarcerated individuals upon release from a correctional facility. The qualitative research process can allow individuals that are currently and formerly incarcerated and have completed the program to provide feedback of their experience in a vocational program. We are able to obtain experimental information and feedback from the participants and suggest ways of incorporating this feedback to improving and/or expanding these vocational programs.

Sampling Method

For our sampling method, we will be conducting sampling on four different focus groups that will consist of at least 8-10 individuals within the state of Oregon. The sampling will be retrieved in the form of group interview responses and the participants will be selected with assistance from the Oregon Department of Corrections. These focus groups will consist of current and formerly incarcerated individuals that identify as either male or female. The first group will consist of participants who have not recidivated following completion of the vocational program and upon release from prison. The second group of participants will consist of people who have recidivated and were not a part of a vocational program while incarcerated previously. The third group of participants will consist of individuals that are not currently
released from an Oregon Department of Corrections prison, have a first time offense, and are in a vocational program. And lastly, the fourth group will consist of participants that are currently not released from a correctional facility within the state of Oregon, have a first time offense, but are not in a vocational setting.

We will be working with the Oregon Department of Corrections in order to select participants that are currently incarcerated and match the specific requirements for this research study. The participants will be selected from two specific correctional facilities in the state of Oregon; Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and Snake River Correctional Institution. Snake River Correctional Institution has the most inmate population in the state of Oregon and therefore will provide a larger pool of individuals to select from. The second correctional facility we will select participants from is Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, which is the only all women’s prison in the state of Oregon. By selecting from these two correctional facilities, we will cast a larger net of finding individuals that are willing to participate in the interview groups. Once we have identified the possible participants that match the criteria needed for the focus group, we will be sending out letters informing the individual of the research study and if they are interested in participating. If the individual agrees to participate in the study, an interviewer will speak with each individual directly. While speaking with the individual, the interviewer will explain the details of the research study as well as provide an information packet and explain the information packet to the individual if they have any questions or concerns. We will ensure to each individual that we speak to that they have the right to agree or walk away from the study and are in no way being forced to participate in this study.
We will also be collaborating with the Oregon Department of Corrections in order to obtain information on possible participants who are no longer incarcerated and fit our specific research group requirements. Once we receive contact information, each of the possible participants will have a letter/information packet, outlining the research study, sent to their address on record. They will be given two weeks to respond to the letter, stating whether they agree or disagree to participate in the study. If we do not receive a response by the 2 week deadline, we will be contacting each individual that did not respond by phoning their contact number on record. Once all of the individuals, whether currently or formerly incarcerated, are fully informed of the entire research study and understand the process, each individual will sign an informed consent form. This signed consent form will give us permission to record the interview group and transcribe the data and information from the interview sessions.

By selecting participants from Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and Snake River Correctional Institution we will be able to gather a wider of experiences from individuals that identify as either male or female. We have taken into consideration that the prison system is not inclusive when it comes to individuals that identify as transgender and gender non-conforming. We acknowledge that there are individuals that are incarcerated and formerly incarcerated that identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. If we come across participants that are placed in either a male or female correctional facility, but identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, they will be accepted and included in the research study if they so wish to participate.

**Data Collection Process**
The data collection process will include recordings from the focus group sessions and transcribing the data that is recorded. The main idea behind this focus group is to provide insight on various experiences that individuals have had in a correctional institution in regards to vocational programs. Two interviewers will be included in each interview session: one facilitator and one co-facilitator. The main facilitator will be asking the key questions needed for the study and keeping the group discussion on topic. The co-facilitator will be recording the session and writing down notes during the interview session. The co-facilitator will be ensuring that the recording devices are working properly during the group interviews and will be listening carefully and ask clarifying questions when needed.

Given the possible length of the interview process and the nature of the questions, the researchers decided to provide minor incentives for participation in the group interview. As an incentive for those currently incarcerated to participate, a $5.00 credit will be deposited into their commissary accounts following the completion of the group interview. The $5.00 credit was decided upon as a reasonable incentive since it is enough to allow the purchasing of small items such as candy and hygiene products, but not a large enough amount to force the individual the need to participate in the research study. As an incentive for those that were formerly incarcerated, a voucher for a foot-long Subway sandwich will be provided to the participants upon completion of the interview group. This incentive was chosen to encourage participation without providing large compensation and unfairly compelling individuals to participate in the research due to the notion that they would be missing out on a beneficial financial opportunity.
Qualitative Research Questions

The areas and themes that we want to focus on to collect the data are key interview questions that are semi-structured enough to leave room for participant discussion and follow-up questions. The questions will be framed as open-ended questions for the participants as not to create any leading questions that could obstruct the outcome of the data. An example of the list of key questions that will be used during the focus groups are located in Appendix A. There are 12 key questions that are to be asked within a 1 to 2 hour period that will allow time for constructive feedback and open discussion on experiences. The time allotted for the focus group will be dependent on the number of participants involved in the focus groups.

Qualitative Analysis Plan

Once we complete the various focus groups, we will collect the raw data from each session. From there, the research team will be going through the transcripts and data individually and as a team. We will be using an excel spreadsheet to code the data from the focus groups and we will also, next to the coding, report our own notes and observations next to the coding data chart. Each researcher will input their initials next to the observation and notes that they recorded in order to keep track of each members notes. This current process is open coding and we will be pulling aspects of axial coding to pull out specific themes that we come across. In doing that we will be examining interrelated themes by using grounded theory in a data analysis. We are going to use the data to draw a conclusion about recidivism and how the research subjects perceive vocational education programs in correctional facilities.
Human Subjects Risk and Protections

For this research study, we recognize the necessity and the priority of setting protective factors for the population sample that we have set out to research. We will be looking at a vulnerable population that fall under some sort of exploitation if the research is not conducted as careful and ethically as possible. It is also important that when we collect the data that there is no identification of the subjects, or the population that we selected. There is also an importance to consider minimizing the risks involved if subject choose to be in the study.

Peer Feedback

We incorporated feedback from our peers into our research design in a number of different ways. One of the ways we did this was through getting rid of one of the articles we had initially used and substituting it for a more up to date article after receiving feedback that the article may be too dated. Another way we incorporated our peer feedback into our project design was through changing the way certain sentences were worded, per the suggestions of our reviewers, in order to add clarity to the meaning of those sentences. Additionally, we expanded and went into more depth in our Methodology section, per the suggestions of our reviewers. Overall, we found the feedback of our peers to be exceptionally helpful as it assisted us not only in identifying areas of our research proposal that needed additional work, but also helped us to identify areas of strength within our research proposal.

Professor Feedback

We incorporated feedback from our professor in a number of significant ways. For instance in an effort to be ethically cautious about providing an incentive for participants, but ensuring it did not end up unfairly coercing anyone’s participation, we ended up being overly
cautious and providing too small of an amount for compensation for currently incarcerated participants, offering only $2 per incarcerated participant. As a result, of the feedback we received, we raised the compensation being offered to a more reasonable $5 per incarcerated participant. Additionally, in an effort to try to get a wide sample we initially were going to have 2,000 participants in our quantitative section, but our professor rightly pointed out that logistically this would be a lot. As a result, we reduced the number of qualitative participants to 600, an amount that still provides a solid sample but is much more feasible for our proposed research. Likewise, in our qualitative section, we reduced our number of focus groups

The changes we made based on Lalit’s feedback really demonstrate the importance of us as inexperienced researchers being mentored and supervised by more experienced researchers. As people who have not conducted research studies before, as a group we all felt it was a tremendous asset to be able to get feedback from an experienced researcher like Lalit who has been there and can counsel us regarding potential logistical challenges we might run into when we go to conduct our research, and how we can avoid those challenges in the first place. If any of us decide to pursue PhD’s someday, we now have a clear understanding of how crucial it will be for us to seek out research mentors and dissertation supervisors who are experienced and familiar with the type of research we wish to conduct.
References


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Appendix A
Interviewer Questions for Qualitative Research Group Interviews

1. Have you participated in any research studies prior to this one?
2. If yes, how were your experiences with the previous study?
3. If no, how do you feel about participating in this study?
4. Do you perceive any way race or ethnicity has played a role in your incarceration or recidivism?
5. Do you perceive any way that your gender identity has played a role in your incarceration or recidivism?
6. Has your sexual orientation played a role in your incarceration or recidivism?
7. What’re your thoughts on job training programs? (i.e. vocational education, degree accreditation).
8. Were there positive impacts that you perceived from the educational training? If so, what were they?
9. Were there negative impacts that you perceived from the educational training? If so, what were they?
10. How do you relate the education you’ve received to your experience outside of prison?
11. Are there some changes that you would like to see with educational training programs in correctional facilities?
12. How has your personal strengths played a role in your incarceration or recidivism?
Appendix B

In the SIR screen in OMS, assign an individual score to each of these 15 items:

1. Current Offence
2. Age at Admission
3. Previous Incarceration
4. Revocation or Forfeiture
5. Act of Escape
6. Security Classification
7. Age at First Adult Conviction
8. Previous Convictions for Assault
9. Marital Status at Most Recent Admission
10. Interval at Risk Since Last Offence
11. Number of Dependents at Most Recent Admission
12. Current Total Aggregate Sentence
13. Previous Convictions for Sex Offences
14. Previous Convictions for Break and Enter
15. Employment Status at Arrest
Appendix C
Questions on the SAQ assessment

**Risks and Needs**

1. Age at first arrest
2. Previous adult convictions
3. Incarcerations as an adult
4. Youth dispositions
5. Incarcerations as a delinquent (before age 16)
6. Variety of offenses
7. Previous incarcerations
8. Failures to appear in court
9. Technical violations or breaches of conditions of supervision while on probation
10. Technical violations or breaches of conditions of supervision while on parole
11. New offenses on supervision while on probation
12. New offenses on supervision while on parole
13. Transfer to custody on supervision while on probation
14. Transfer to custody on supervision while on parole
15. Previous escapes or escape attempts
16. Violent behavior in past 6 months
17. Previous convictions for violent offenses
18. Violence toward unknown victims
19. Perpetration of domestic violence
20. Violations of protection or no contact orders
21. Age at first alcohol/drug use
22. Frequency of alcohol/drug use and disruption of function
23. Gang associations
24. Peer relationships—antisocial peers
25. Current intimate relationship—instability, conflict, and dissatisfaction
26. Marital factors—perpetrated domestic violence and/or has partner with antisocial history
27. Attachment to children—conflict and/or absence of positive contact with children
28. Employment history—unemployed, quit, fired, interpersonal conflict with co-workers
29. Employment motivation—no interest in finding or maintaining employment
30. Law-abiding attitudes—unwilling to demonstrate law-abiding behavior
31. Accepts responsibility—proud of criminal behavior; minimizes, justifies, and so on.
32. Impulsivity—cannot identify triggers that cause problem behaviors
33. Hostile attributions—attributes hostile intentions to non-confrontational or neutral behavior
34. Financial—social assistance, high debt, and so on.
35. Accommodation—unstable accommodations; lacks realistic plan for accommodations
36. Mental health condition
37. Homicidal ideation
38. Suicidal ideation
39. History of sexual aggression

**Strengths**
1. Peer relationships—friends with positive, prosocial influence
2. Current intimate relationship—stability, satisfaction, and commitment
3. Marital factors—partner has prosocial influence
4. Attachment to children—rewarding relationship with children and commitment to parenting role
5. Employment motivation—motivated to find and maintain employment
6. Law-abiding attitudes—positive commitment toward law-abiding behavior
7. Accepts responsibility—voluntarily accepts responsibility for criminal behavior
8. Impulsivity—uses self-control techniques to avoid trouble
9. Hostile attributions—can tolerate criticism or hostility; shows restraint
10. Financial—comfortable financial situation
11. Accommodation—stable accommodations with spouse, family, and so on.