

**LEARNING IN BARS: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A
SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON**

by

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Learning in bars: The experiences of undergraduate students in a South African
Prison

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DECLARATION

I declare that, **Learning in bars: The experiences of undergraduate students in a South African Prison**, is my own work and that all the sources that I used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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DATE

Philippians 4:13 and 20

“For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

“Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever”.

Amen

DEDICATION

I dedicate the current study to my wife Christine. Thank you for all the love support and encouragement you have given me in growing years. You are the best and it is my pray that God should bless you richly. I love you.

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SUMMARY

LEARNING BEHIND BARS: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON

Never before has the learning experience of incarcerated persons been captured by one of their fellow inmates. Public perception is that prisoners should be denied access to educational opportunities and be punished for the crimes committed. In this groundbreaking study, situated in the qualitative paradigm, I recorded the learning experiences of a group of inmates who are studying at undergraduate level, via distance learning. This phenomenological study originated from my experience of studying while incarcerated, and is aimed at increasing our knowledge of, and enhancing our understanding of incarcerated persons. The study focuses on the learning experiences and challenges encountered by these students. Data was collected from the participants using qualitative methods and analysed using content analysis. Interpretation of the data revealed a number of factors which impede the studies of these students. The investigation is of importance to all persons involved in the Corrections environment but also the general public as inmates return to their communities upon release.

Key terms: learning experience; phenomenology; incarceration; challenges; recidivism; hostile; undergraduate; lock-downs; release; crime-free.

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CHAPTER ONE

Learning in bars: The experiences of undergraduate students in a South African Prison

1. INTRODUCTION

When people think of prisoners, images of violent criminals come to mind. We think they should be “locked up and the key thrown away,” and as part of their punishment should have no rights at all Van Heerden (2011). Many of the outside population have images of the prison population comprising hardened criminals wearing striped suits, tough gangs fighting for power, steel bars, crowded cells or solitary confinement and even escape. The traditional and probably the oldest view of prison education programmes was that the aim of education and training was to decriminalize the inmates McKay (1998). Silva (2003) contends that it is perfectly acceptable to express negative feelings towards prisoners. As the members of society who have failed with regards to society’s rules, prisoners are rejected to the furthest fringes, much as prisons themselves are relegated to desolate areas far from the general population.

Structured in such a way as to maximize the number of activities characterized as criminals and the number of persons in prison, prisons ensure that as many persons as possible remain in prison or return thereafter they are released Frolander-Ulf & Yates (2001). According to Silva (2003) prisons are aversive places both for the inmates and for employees. The paradox of imprisonment lies in society’s expectations of both retribution and rehabilitation Bayliss (2003). There are attempts all over the world to provide education to prisoners in the belief that after they are released, they would be able to return to society and leave the life of crime Al Saif (2007).

According to Lempert et al. (2005), prisons are these completely opaque institutions that have no interaction with the community, and everything that is done, is done to

keep that opacity going. As a result, people may not even be aware that inmates are able to attend school or even pursue studies at higher education level.

Therefore, gone are the days when prisoners did time and returned to communities without skills to help them live honest lives. These days, with rehabilitation programmes at Correctional Services facilities, prisoners have a chance to change their lives for the better by furthering their studies Mashego (2011). Education is on one of the great success stories of the South African democracy, and the right to education is a basic human right, which is granted to all South African citizens including those who are incarcerated or detained in South African prisons.

Information regarding the activities of inmates is very limited, resulting to not much being known about what happens in South African prisons. Generally, in prisons throughout the world, “inmates are told what to wear and eat, what time to eat, wake up and sleep, when to participate in recreation, when they can make phone calls and to whom, when family and friends can visit, and what they can receive in mail” Geraci (2005). Frolander- Ulf and Yates (2001) express the view that in prison, the general sense is one of unrestricted power, the possibility, at any time, of violence and fear. “Seeing the prisoners in their drab and dusty prison garments and getting glimpses of the stark and unembellished buildings, without any hint of green or anything pleasing, we quickly disabuse of the notion that people in prison are coddled or have ready access to normal amenities much less luxuries”.

Mitra (n.d.) postulates that education should be understood as one of the main function of prisons in preparing inmates’ return to society. Studies have shown that prisoners who have been involved in educational programs tend to stay out of prison after release and are less violent.

Bayliss (2003) maintain that through learning in prison, small incremental changes in behaviour and attitudes may occur. If education were to be integrated throughout the prison so that it becomes a secure learning organization, perhaps greater benefits would follow, thus encouraging inmates to continue education after their release to

become lifelong learners. For education in prison to be of any use, it has to be structured and coordinated” Westrheim (2008).

Stevens and Ward (1997) explain the role of correctional education as to (1) function as an agent of change for both the inmate and the system, (2) maintain its integrity in terms of its basic commitment to freedom of inquiry, (3) study, evaluate and respond to all variables in the individual, system and society that are to be benefited by the educational concerns with process, product and social reform. These authors further content that correctional academic education should relieve boredom of dead-head prison time, thereby giving students a better understanding of society in order to prevent costly incarceration.

In the South African context, education is a right that is not curtailed by incarceration, and between the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), literacy, schooling and basic adult education are priorities. International instruments instruct that education in a Corrections environment must be in line with the educational system of society as a whole, and provision must be made for continuity of educational activities of people incarcerated in prison and for those who are released on parole Corrections White paper (2004).

As students become literate, they are empowered to change themselves and to take action in the world. Travis (2011:8) proposes, “we should elevate the notion that an education can serve as a pathway to successful reintegration, and that the jarring experience of leaving prison and returning home may require a distinctive support system for students who have been incarcerated.”

Education should, therefore, “not only be seen as a way of deterring prisoners from a life of crime, it should be recognized as a human right to which every person is entitled without discrimination and is therefore considered important for social justice” Mitra (n.d.).

Bhatti (2009) expresses the view that students in prisons realize that they have a second chance to learn but also that this endeavour is fraught with difficulties. Not all

students studying at university level may have the necessary skills to cope. Although distance education provides a comprehensive study package, not many people are used to studying completely in isolation from the institution, their teachers and their fellow students Unisa, (2010a). According to Unisa (2010b), one of the limitations of distance teaching is that students and lecturers have very little personal contact. On the other hand, resources within the prison environment are limited for students. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore in detail the experiences of inmates studying at undergraduate level in one South African prison.

1.2 Problem Statement

According to Van Heerden (2011), most prisoners want to better themselves so that they never have to return to prison. Van Heerden (2011) further maintains that many a scientific studies have shown that the best way to reform and improve behaviour is through education. Students studying in prison face numerous challenges in their endeavour to ameliorate themselves. Weisel et al. (2005) state that schooling has become a painful experience for many, and their feelings of shame and anger at becoming unsuccessful in a world where academic achievement is highly valued, run deep.

This statement is an expression of the emotional, psychological, and even fearful feelings that inmates experience. Ashley et al. (1994) quote one student as saying:

One of the main problems is that of noise. Jail is a very noisy place, and it is rarely quiet [...] at times, it is very hard to concentrate with all the noise. I can't study during communal periods because of the loudness of the TV. Noise is a major problem. I can cope with studying if I can use the lock-up for studying and also sacrifice the exercise time if needed.

In his research, Van Heerden (2011) identified some concerns of incarcerated students. These included limited access to resources such as books, internet, journals, email, and external communications.

South Africa's recent history has shown both the potential and the difficulties of distance education. Robben Island became South Africa's first and, arguably, most successful learning centre during the long years in which many of South Africa's foremost leaders were imprisoned there. However, the success of that learning centre was not a result of a conscious institutional decision to provide support for its learners. The learners themselves took the initiative, supported not by tutors from the provider institution, but by volunteers who acted as messengers between institutions, families, and prisoners, to ensure that they progress from course to course. This is because students during the eighties were wont to say: 'under odds, we will study, under odds, we will pass!' Welch & Glennie (2005).

1.2.1 Research questions

The purpose of the proposed inquiry is to gain insight into, and an understanding of the experiences that these incarcerated students encounter during their studies. The research question is, therefore, formulated as follows: **What are the experiences of undergraduate students in one South African prison?**

In order to fully explore the research question above, the following critical questions will be addressed:

- What are the views of student-inmates pertaining to their studies?
- What are the challenges faced by student-inmates?
- What kind of support, if any, is provided to student-inmates?
- How can their views about learning behind bars be understood?

1.2.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore in detail the experiences of undergraduate students in one South African prison.

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the views of student-inmates.

- To explore the challenges faced by student-inmates.
- To explore the kind of support provided to student-inmates.
- To explore how their views about learning behind bars be understood.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

As discussed earlier, the study is aimed at exploring the experiences of inmates who are studying whilst incarcerated. The broad aim of the study is to contribute to the body of literature relating to incarcerated persons, focusing on inmates and their experiences while studying at undergraduate level.

Silva (2003) maintains that there have been calls for more research on Correctional aspects, indicating that literature address courtroom procedures, eyewitness accuracy, jury decisions and so forth. Little is known about the psychology of prisons and imprisonment. This study heeds the call made by Silva (2003) by attempting to address the hiatus nature information regarding prisoners and prisons.

Researchers do not often discuss the learning experience that is under constant surveillance within the prison service Bhatti (2009). In their research, Richards, Faggiani, Roffers, Hendricksen and Kruger (2008) found that prison research has often failed to reflect the views of prisoners. In support of the idea, Pollock (1997) further states that inmates are reluctant to become involved in any research. Due to my incarcerated state, the prison as a unique research site, presents itself with a rare opportunity to explore the phenomenon. Over the years, I have built up a relationship of mutual trust with the participants and as such, the fears of mis-representation are eliminated. The participants are also aware of my dual role of researcher and inmate, and their participation in the study is voluntary and free from the surveillance of prison authorities.

The study is important because of “the growing prison population” Garner (2005) and the negative views that people hold. As Frolander-UIf and Yates (2001) put it “...people respond to the idea of college education in prison with the argument-why

should they have access to it, when I cannot afford to put my child through college?” The study will contribute to a new perspective on inmates, thus attempting to dispel the negativity surrounding inmates while challenging existing literature. It provides a platform to influence policy makers in government departments such as the Departments of Justice, Higher Education, and Correctional Services.

Heads of correctional centres and DCS educators will be made aware of the benefits of providing educational opportunities for incarcerated persons, and the study may serve as motivation for them to take education more seriously inside Corrections centres.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The chapter divisions of the study are as follows:

Chapter 1-INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general overview of the study, including an introduction, research problem, research question, aims the rationale for the investigation and the overview of the study.

Chapter 2 - LEARNING BEHIND BARS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature for the study by providing information on the experience of incarcerated persons who are studying.

Chapter 3- METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research process in-depth and explains the research design and methods such as approach, design, site selection, sampling, data collection, and analysis techniques.

Chapter 4- PRESENTATION OF RAW DATA

This chapter presents an analysis and synthesis of the research findings, interpret the data and discusses the research findings in the form of a case study.

Chapter 5 – SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMEDATIONS

This chapter presents a synthesis of the study including a summary of each chapter, conclusion and make recommendations.

1.5 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are clarified below:

- a) Prisoner, incarcerated people, inmates and student interchangeably: Refers to an inmate who is studying while serving his/her prison sentence Government Gazette (1988).
- b) Recidivism: is the re-incarceration for a criminal offence Stevens & Ward (1997).
- c) Prison warder, prison official and official: refers to those persons employed by Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and for the purpose of this study, are those persons working with inmates Government Gazette (1988).
- d) Educationist: the correctional officer in charge of the educational activities' of inmates.
- e) Prison, jail, detention centre, and corrections centre/facility: these are used interchangeably in this study and mean the place where inmates are detained to serve their sentences Oxford Advanced Learning Dictionary (2006).

1.6 SUMMARY

Little is known about the activities of inmates inside the country's prison. This chapter offers an overview of the study by acquainting the reader with some aspects into the lives of prisoners. It starts by giving a "general public" perception and opinion of people's thoughts on prisoners, and gradually, the reader is drawn into the prison environment with particular focus on the educational activities that surround inmates.

It also provides the reader with the problem statement which gives rise to the research question namely: "what are the experiences and challenges of undergraduate

students at one South African prison?” In order to accomplish this, critical questions are formulated to assist in adequately answering the main research question. The chapter proceeds by providing the rationale for the study, the aims of the investigation and finally, an overview of the study by providing the reader with a brief synopsis of each chapter.

In the next chapter, I present a review of literature pertaining to prison and those inmates who use opportunity to study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on topics related to incarcerated persons who are studying and provides information for an understanding of the prison system, including who South Africans inmates are; the need for education in prisons; and challenges faced by these students.

2.2 PRISON SYSTEM

The department of correctional services (DCS) is responsible for the running of South Africa's prison system. It is responsible for 240 prisons, which accommodate approximately 189,748 inmates. The prisons include minimum, medium, and maximum- security facilities Wikipedia (2011). The purpose of the correctional system [prison] is to contribute to maintaining and protecting a just, peaceful, and safe society by:

- enforcing sentences of the courts;
- detaining all prisoners in safe custody ensuring their human dignity; and
- promoting social responsibility and human development of all prisoners and persons subject to community corrections Government Gazette (1998).

According to Bezuidenhout (2008:194), the primary objective of the DCS is safe custody of offenders; provision of humane treatment the detention of offenders; ensuring development; integration of offenders in to society; provision of community supervision and managing resources effectively. According to the Government Gazette (1998), the DCS is also to provide access to a full range of programmed activities to meet the education and training needs of sentenced prisoners. The department must provide, as far as practically possible, other development and support programs, which meet specific needs of sentenced prisoners. The responsibility of DCS is not

punishment but primarily to correct offender behaviour in order to facilitate the achievement of rehabilitation (DCS 2008).

2.2.1 Who are South African inmates?

The South African inmate population is not homogeneous in its composition. It consists of male and female, juvenile and adult offenders. They are people who have transgressed in their behaviour, resulting in them having committed a crime for which a court of law has sentenced them to a term of imprisonment. They come from diverse cultural, religious, social, political, socio-economic, racial, and sexual backgrounds. They are very diverse, and the only thing they have in common and that unites them is the fact that they are “prisoners”. According to DCS (2008), sentences imposed on inmates range from 6 months to life imprisonment. There are also foreign nationals doing time in South African prisons DCS (2008).

Nobody is immune to been incarcerated. South Africa’s rich history has shown that even its leaders are subjected to the rule of law in this country.

2.3 THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT

Prison is a naturally radicalizing environment Frolander-Ulf & Yates (2001); it is a hostile environment designed for containment and punishment Greg (2007) and damages the prisoners’ sense of self Williams (1991). Common to all inmates throughout the world, those doing time in prison experience tremendous psychological trauma. Many inmates live in fear of the prison environment and allow their thoughts to drift outside of the prison walls as a way of escape from the emotional pain they feel.

Wigley (1992) comments that “locked in a cell, you could at least kid yourself that you were locking the system out and retain some degree of privacy for part of the day. But here you were under observation twenty-four hours a day living in fear of being ‘nicked’ for walking too fast, having a shoe lace untied, breathing too heavily, or having the wrong expression on your face”.

Wigley (1992) further states that some ex-convicts continue to experience the emotional and psychological trauma long after they are released from prison. The memories were deeply engrained in Malcolm, (one of the participants in Wigley's study) and some experiences still hurt when he called them. Not even twenty years of rebuilding and restoring his life fully removed the deep psychological damage of those prison years.

Bhatti (2009) contends that the prison is a closed environment, and there are laws, written ones, which appear in formal documents and unwritten ones which define how individuals should behave, which person to cross and which person to avoid. Bhatti further maintains that prisons house people whom the legal system and society has put 'out of sight' and often 'out of mind'. Lempert, Bergeron, and Linker (2005) express the view that "prisoners are often built in inaccessible areas to remove society's evil-doers, the bad apples that threaten the security of law-abiding citizens. Prison removes this evil influences from the visibility and consequently, from the collective consciousness of less transgressive citizens".

It, therefore, becomes apparent that due to the "inaccessible" nature of prison, it becomes difficult and costly for family and friends to visit inmates. Those members of society who rely on public transport will most certainly experience greater difficulty to visit their loved ones due the rising cost in public transport. Keeping close ties with family members who are in prison becomes difficult, and at the same time, a punishment for the incarcerated individually and his/her family.

2.3.1 Prisons' daily routine

"Time slows down in prison, and the day seems endless" Mandela (2003). Inside prison, inmates may spend 17 hours a day locked in their cells, with one hour a day outside for exercise Chulp (2005). Some prisons set specific time limits that inmates spend outside their cells engaging in constructive activities Department for Education and Skills (2005), while some inmates who do not work in prison attend the gym Irwin (2003) or turn to vocational education because it has the potential of developing skills

which can lead to future employment upon release, and due to need to stay active. Prisoners also attend programmes such as “job training, anger management courses, group counselling, and psychotherapy” Bayliss (2003), depending on the availability of these programmes in the prison. Some inmates spend their time watching television, smoking or sleeping. Inmates are also allowed visits from their families Crothers (1998), make phone call, and receive mail Geraci (2005).

Attempts to find information relevant to the educational activities of South African inmates proved to be an ineffectual exercise. However, inmates do have an opportunity to attend school or study as Ashley et al. (1994) puts it, “education has had a place in the regime of prison since imprisonment, as a punishment itself became a legitimate social sanction”.

2.4 EDUCATION ON THE INSIDE

Many offenders have limited education Goebel (2005), and many prisoners have had negative experiences of compulsory schooling, thereby rejecting learning at the earliest opportunity Irwin (2003). For the vast majority of incarcerated offenders, prison is a transitional placement. After serving their sentences, the majority of offender’s transition from incarceration back to their communities. Ex-offenders struggle to find their place in society while coping with the social pressure and economic hardships that led them to crime in the first place Goebel (2005).

In his key note address Travis (2011) expressed the view that incarcerated individuals are denied access to the educational opportunities available to their counterparts in free society and that the levels of educational attainment for incarcerated persons is low, with high levels of educational challenges. On the other hand, a study by Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) reported that 70% of all people entering state Correctional facilities have completed high school, with 46% having no high school education at all. Having been sidelined in the past, the education of prisoners is now receiving closer government attention in the UK, Bayliss (2003).

2.4.1 The need for education in prison

Early research on the benefits of education for reducing recidivism was far from conclusive; it often showed mixed and, at times, contradictory results (Martinson 1974; Palmer, 1976) cited in Richards et al. (2008). Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) indicate that studies have shown that the more schooling an imprisoned person receives, the less likely he or she is to get in trouble upon release. Literacy programmes reduce recidivism, job-training programmes reduce recidivism, and college programmes reduce recidivism

Travis (2011) asks the question: does education in prison reduce the risk of re-offending once inmates are released? He uses findings of a 2008 study by Dr. Gerald Gaes who reviewed four meta-analyses and found that participation in educational programmes associated with reduction in recidivism ranges from 7 to 46 percent. In a study conducted by the Correctional Education association studying recidivism rate in three states (Maryland, Ohio, and Minnesota) over a three year period found that there is a 29 percent overall reduction in the recidivism rate for the group participating in correctional educational [programmes] in comparison to those not participating Richards et al., (2008). Bayliss (2003) found that inmates studying in a university Liberal Arts programme were 75 percent free from incarceration after three years – a figure much higher than comparative groups of prisoners. Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) express the view that one thing that is most likely to prevent a return to prison, is education.

Not only does education work in terms of helping the incarcerated persons get on with life after prison Frolander –Ulf and Yates (2001), it can also provide the link to adult education courses such as access to higher education. If education classes are provided on the condition that crime rates will subsequently be reduced, it follows that if only marginal results are produced, education could be withdrawn Bayliss (2003). The value of prison education programmes is obvious. Bayliss (2003) state that the prison education”...encourages negotiation and choice, tries to build self-confidence and self-worth and develop critical thinking”. Wong Ken Seng, Minister for Home Affairs

(2000) in his opening speech, stated the aim of prison school is “improving inmate’s educational qualifications, thereby socially levelling them up. With this special environment, the prison school would promote a culture of continuous learning, self-discipline, and motivation”.

Goebel (2005) expresses the view that ex-offenders struggle to find their place in society, indicating that re-entry efforts should begin while offenders are still in correctional facilities. Inmates who address their education needs during confinement do better when they return to their families.

Increasing the level of education and reducing illiteracy among the incarcerated population can prevent recidivism and help ex-offenders to become responsible, productive members of society. From the available literature, it is clear that in many prisons across the world, “prison schools” are becoming the norm, and the focus is shifting from detention to rehabilitation and integration. So, who are those inmates who use the opportunity to learn experiences learning in such a hostile environment?

2.4.2 Opportunity to learn

It is difficult to describe the students in prison as they come from a diverse background as Ashley et al. (1994) explain:

The variety amongst students in prison is so amazing. It ranges from those who left school at 16 (or earlier) and who have worked their way up in prison basic education [...] to the students who have decided to study for a second degree a way of using their time in prison.

Students in prison realize that they have a second chance to learn Bhatti (2009) and become knowledge seeking persons, who encourage others to seek knowledge and assist them in the process Westrheim (2008).

Muth (2005) states that prisoners display an extremely diverse range of abilities. Students in prison are motivated to learn. Inside prison, “education” serves as a

motivation to learn Travis (2011). The students who attend school in prison want to learn because they are petrified of failing and making fools of themselves Bhatti (2009). Richard et al. (2008) express the view that convict criminology course gives prisoners hope that they could still become ‘somebody’ one day. On the other hand, many others see prison education as ‘providing educational opportunities that go far beyond their previous experiences and imagination’ Westrheim (2008).

2.4.3 Challenges faced by students

Inmates are not immune to life’s pressures and challenges. They face daily challenges within the prison environment such as untimely searches, gang fights and lock-downs. Added to the pressure and stress is the fact that within the prison environment, it is not easy to find a neutral space. Chulp (2005) explains, “the students are permitted only a certain area of square footage in their cells”. The problem becomes compounded due to lack of ‘silence zone’ Thomas (1995).

Time is also a major problem for inmates, especially for those who are studying. Bayliss (2003) states, “everybody is competing for prisoners’ time. Education, work, vocational training, and cognitive behavioural psychological programmes are all separately run sections; each can make a demand on that ‘purposeful activity’ time, which also includes time in the gym, visits, and phone calls”. Most of the prisoners’ days are taken up with the prison routine and work periods Ashley et al., (1994).

Muth (2005) give an account of a student’s experience of using available time as: “by the time I get off work, eat and shower and go through to the room, I read from eight to twelve – a four hour a night”.

Studying whilst incarcerated is an extremely difficult, if not an impossible task. Added to this virtually impossible task are security issues. Woods (2005) explains that Correction is sometimes at odds with education issues. Security may deem it necessary to lock down a living unit, at worst putting a halt to all education activity for the day.

2.4.4 Types of learning inside prison

In the prison environment, learning takes place both formally and informally. According to Bhatti (2009), informal learning occurs through ‘the stories prisoners tell one another about survival through self-preservation, resilience or about their real and imagined self inside and outside prison. Informal learning is also self-directed by way of, for example, reading and reflecting. Formal learning takes place in the provision of formal education programmes. The amount and type of education offered in Corrections seems to change depending on the approach and philosophy to Corrections that are dominant at the time Chulp (2005). In some prisons, education is privileged to be removed if prisoners do not conform to the dictates’ of the prison authority Irwin (2003). This view is supported by Bayliss (2003) stating that education in prison is not a human right, but a tool for prison management.

In the state of Vermont (US), schooling is compulsory for incarcerated offenders under 22 years of age who do not have a high school diploma Woods (2005).

I also draw on the experiences of teachers who teach in the prison environment to give a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in prison education. Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) postulate that ‘teaching in prison is a transformative experience for the teacher. Just going into prison gives one a good idea of how a prison strips away a person’s individuality as it takes away his and her freedom. These authors further assert that the classroom provides one of the few spaces inside the prison where free-flowing discussions can occur in a relatively safe environment unencumbered by the presence of people in authority. Bhatti (2009) reports that one of the teachers interviewed explains, “many of the students we teach have mental health problems often caused by drugs or alcohol. Provided a student is not considered to be a danger, they can come into class”.

Those teachers who teach in prison schools are able to empathize with inmates while other teachers may feel that they are ‘not quite up to it’.

According to Ashley et al. (1994), this was one tutor's experience at a maximum-security prison:

Tutors cannot pass through the prison without being escorted. We have to go through nine locked gates before meeting our students. The education wing is situated at the top of one of the prison buildings, which contains a gym and cells on the lower floors. It is reached by walking across the outer yard, then passing through the inner perimeter fence and walking past the workshops. The fence is patrolled by officers with dogs. Tutors will meet inmates on their journey from reception to education. The corridors are crowded late in the afternoon when the departure of the teaching staff coincides with inmates queuing for their tea. Inmates will also be returning from the workshops to the wing at this time.

Teaching in a corrections' environment is not an easy task, as opposed to teaching in a public school or university. Although those learners who attend the prison schools are docile, the challenge in providing quality schooling in a hostile environment is an enormous task. Those teaching in prison should first adapt to the prison environment and the students without showing any form of trepidation. The provision of adequate resources is largely dependent on the DCS, and the lack of resources will only hinder learner development and may cause learners to become despondent and give up on studying.

2.5 STUDYING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ROUTE

Some inmates who are already in possession of a school-leaving certificate use this opportunity for further studies. They pursue higher educational studies in the form of diplomas, higher diplomas and degrees.

2.5.1 Undergraduate studies

Students studying for their first degree at the university usually undertake undergraduates studies' Collins (1983) and Oxford (2006). At undergraduate level of university studies, the focus is mainly on gaining a specific knowledge foundation in a field of study and acquiring certain mental skills. The process is guided by a lecture

Unisa (2011a). Most institutions of higher education have formal entry requirements, and few prisoners' possess these conventional matriculation qualifications Worth, (1996), Ashley et al., (1994).

For incarcerated students in the South African context, “distance education was identified as a key mechanism for facilitating access, participation, and redress especially in higher education. Distance education plays a significant role in South Africa particularly in higher education. It affords access to a large diverse student population of both mature students and school leavers unable to access face to face universities whose education needs might otherwise go unmet” SAIDE (2010). The open and distance learning (ODL) model of tuition represents an approach that centres around the needs of the learner rather than the traditional method of tuition; accepts that in the modern global economy, life-long learning is a given; is flexible in its methods of learning aids; removes as many barriers as possible to provide access to students; recognizes prior learning; has programmes designed with the challenges of the students in mind; provides support to student through comprehensive feedback on assignments City Press (2011).

For students incarcerated internationally, the Open University (OU) opened in 1971 and seemed to have a number of features that would enable it to offer a degree – level study to students in prison Ashley et al., (1994). In comparison, both ODL and OU are the same concerning the following:

- It was designed to be available to a wide range of students, including those in remote and often inaccessible locations;
- Course material were distributed through the mail and students studied in their own time and place;
- These materials, usually supplemented by a limited number of additional books, contained all the essential learning and teaching components; and
- A central feature of OU was the detailed correspondence tuition; all tutorial classes were optional so as not to disadvantage isolated students Ashley, et al. (1994).

The Inviting Convicts to College programme, run by CC at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, (USA) serves as a bridge from prison to University. It is important to note that universities and prison working together to reduce recidivism in helping prisoners to become productive citizens can serve the community (Richards et al., (2009). The training that inmates receive must correspond with jobs that are in high demand Goebel (2005) while public higher education can play an indispensable role in countering the forces in our society that are leading to the marginalization of others Travis (2011).

In their article, Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001), wrote that in the late 1960's or early 1970's, prisoners wrote to faculty members at some universities asking about opportunities to enrol in college courses. Several progressive faculties from the Black Studies, Communication, and Psychology departments at the University of Pittsburgh responded by organizing programmes allowing incarcerated persons to enrol in selected courses offered by university faculties inside the institution". Nevertheless, sometimes inmates who enrol at institutions of higher learning are treated with, as Richards et al., (2008) puts it 'legal discrimination'. These authors further contend that some universities openly discriminate against convicted felons, denying them admission and student aid Richards et al., (2008). Bayliss (2003) explains that prison education, linked to adult education courses can be a link to higher education, while Richard et al. (2008) states in Wisconsin, former prisoners who completed the "inviting convicts to college" have already started their studies at several University of Wisconsin campuses. Pursuing an education may not be top priority for everyone, but for a large percentage of people coming home from prison, a college experience can be a grounding experience Travis (2011). Within the academic year of distance education learning, there a number of critical, phases or hurdles that learners must overcome Dresselhaus, (2005). These critical phases may include registration, receiving of study material, planning of year programme, assignments and exams.

2.5.2 Difficulties of studying through distance learning

Some of the challenges encountered by prison students are similar to those encountered by outside students, only more intense Worth (1996). Worth (1996) continues by saying that students become aware of the anti-intellectual culture that treats academic study with hostility both on the part of inmates and on the part of some officers to whom the educated inmates may seem to pose a status-threat. Lempert et al. (2005) explain that prison power dynamics make it much more difficult for students to challenge negative comments. Woods (2005) states, “a few individuals (fortunately a very few) believe that inmates are incapable of change [...] and that the only effective means of management are punishment and force”. Corresponded teaching, which is at the heart of OU [and ODL] teaching and learning is normally handled similarly for both inmates and outside students. It is in the area of assignments that the supportive relationships may be challenged and stretched almost to breaking point, since inmates students cannot easily contact their tutor. If a student has an urgent need to communicate with the tutor, a message at second hand, can be sent via the education office or by means of letter both entailing some inevitable delay Worth (1996). The problem is intensified by the “skyrocketing cost of telephone calls” Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001). Ashley et al. (1994) explains that students in prison are potentially disadvantaged in that they cannot easily initiate direct contact; they have fewer tutorial sessions; they cannot telephone the tutor; and it is harder for them to avoid late submission of assignments.

Students are vulnerable to life crises that their continuing links with the outside world bring such as family disruptions, family break-ups or financial problems over which they have no control. The kinds of academic support that inmates receive are especially valuable to them (Worth, 1994). Ashley et al. (1994) explain that prisoners have no control over certain aspects of their lives and only have limited responsibility for others. These authors further state that prisoners may be subject to depression and loss of motivation. Their concentration and confidence can be disrupted by events beyond their control, either inside the prison or associated with outside family relationships.

A tutor advised, like most students, those in prison also experience financial difficulty. Curtis (2004) states, “students are now living with increasing levels of debt and borrow money in order to finance their studies” Lempert et al. (2005) is of the view that universities provide limited financial support from discretionary funds. In the US, the ‘Pell Grants’ financed incarcerated students, but this was stopped in 1994 Travis (2011); Lempert et al., (2005); Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001).

2.5.3 The value of higher education for inmates

A study conducted by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in 1990-1991 showed that the recidivism rate for offenders without a college degree was 60 percent, compared to 13.7 percent for those with an associate’s degree, 5.6 percent for those with a bachelor’s degree, and 0 percent for those with a master’s degree. In similar studies conducted in Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts and New York, offenders enrolled in higher education programmes had an average re-arrest rate between 1 and 5 percent Flynn (2005). This study indicates that for those inmates who undertake studies at higher educational level, a relapse into crime is virtually not there.

Goebel (2005) indicates that inmates who address their educational needs during confinement do better when they return to their families and communities and are less likely to be reconvicted. Bayliss (2003) supports the view and states, “prison education can therefore help students to gain qualifications in order to be more attractive to employers”. Ex-offenders have difficulties with criminal records Bayliss (2003); Goebel (2005); Travis (2011), while a college education within a panel environment is valuable in gaining self-confidence, as well as future employment Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001). The benefits of a good education in preventing recidivism and assisting ex-offenders with employment and getting on with life are obvious. More should be done to meet the educational needs and employment challenges of ex-offenders Goebel, (2005).

2.5.4 Support for incarcerated students

In the state of Michigan, it is against the law to use taxpayer's monies to support college programs for inmates Lempert et al., (2005). Inmates who want to study at higher education level are in need of financial assistance as much as students on the outside are.

According to Worth, (1996), prison staff can contribute positively to students. The work of the education department in supporting students learning is crucial. Inmates can obtain information advice and encouragement from staff. Other students are also an invaluable source of support. Westheim (2008) quotes Mandela (2003) as saying, "Robben Island was known as a University because of what we learned from each other. We became our own professors, our own curriculum, and our own course". Support from outside the prison walls is also needed. Crothers (1998) indicates that family loyalty needs to be strong, and their families, throughout the long years of imprisonment, should often visit prisoners weekly.

Finally, Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) express that education in prison reflects an isolating trend. They contend that the studies linking education to recidivism show that the higher the level of schooling attained, the lower the rate of recidivism. Richard et al. (2008) state that prisoners make good college students. In prison, they spend lot of time catching up on their reading. They are already institutionalized, accustomed to living in dormitories and know they have a lot to learn if they want to avoid returning to prison.

Since there is little published literature on the educational experience of South African inmates, the study had to rely largely on international studies such as those done in the UK and US. However, available literature has shown that education in a Corrections environments lies at the hearts of the prevention on recidivism. Education also promotes the successful reintegration of ex-offenders by increasing their chances of finding employment.

2.6 SUMMARY

Besides reviewing what other authors had to write on the educational activities on inmates, the aim of this literature review was also to gain insight into, and an understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by inmates studying while incarcerated.

In the next chapter, the focus shifts to the aspect pertaining to research Methodology and Research design of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology that was used in the study. Research methodology, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) are “ways in which one collects and analyzes data”.

The topics covered in this chapter include the research approach (paradigm), research design, sampling and site selection, data collection strategies, data analysis, reliability and validity, research ethics, researcher’s role, and limitations of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND PARADIGM

Presently, there are two well-known and recognized approaches to research, namely qualitative and quantitative paradigms Fouché and Delport (2005). According to Nieuwenhuis (2008), a paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which give rise to a particular world-view. It addresses fundamental assumptions taken on faith such as beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between knower and known (epistemology), and assumptions about methodologies.

The study employed a qualitative paradigm based on an interpretivist approach. Terre Blanch et al. (2006) express the view that the qualitative-interpretivist paradigm involves taking people’s subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of peoples experience by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us (epistemology), and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyze information (methodology).

Ontology was achieved by the construction of real accounts of the experiences and challenges of the participants in their natural setting focusing on their experience as incarcerated students, their actions and the meaning they assign to this experience. I interacted with the participants, thus getting as close as possible to their real world. As such, qualitative research acknowledges an interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as between the participants and their own experience and how they have constructed reality based on those experiences Nieuwenhuis (2008).

Qualitative research wants to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomenon as they occur in the real world and therefore, wants to study them in their natural setting Kelly (2006). This qualitative paradigm based on an interpretivist approach lends itself to understanding human phenomena in context, as it is lived Terre Blanche et al., (2006). I therefore, express the view that this qualitative paradigm based on an interpretive approach is best suited to address the research question.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Durrheim (2006), a research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. On the other hand, Fouché (2005) explains design as all those decisions a researcher makes in planning the study. Fouché (2006) also explains that qualitative researchers will, during the process, create the research strategy best suited to their research. Henning (2009) is of the view that “a research design is not just a work plan. A work plan details what has to be done to complete the project, but the work plan will flow from the project’s research design. The function of a research design is to ensure that evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible”. The study was conducted using a phenomenological design.

According to Delport and Fouché (2005), a phenomenological study is a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of people who have experienced it first-hand. A phenomenological study is, therefore, a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular

situation. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) further contend that a phenomenological study describes the meaning of a lived experience and that the aim of a phenomenological study is to transform lived experience into a description of its 'essence'. These authors further explain the phenomenological tradition extends understanding rather than generalizability by describing a selected case of a social situation in detail.

The frame of phenomenological study is the type of lived experience McMillan and Schumacher (2006). In this instance, this pertains to the experiences of the group of inmates studying at undergraduate level at one of the South African prisons. The typical technique is for the researcher to conduct long interviews with the informants directed towards understanding their perspective on their everyday lived experience with the phenomenon McMillan & Schumacher (2006). Greeff (2005) expresses the view that people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without a context, there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience.

In order to accomplish the essence of the experience, the researcher should be able to enter the subjects "life-world" Fouche, (2005). Since I live and interact with the participants on a daily basis, I am able to enter their life-world, because the experience is common to both of us. I am currently incarcerated and as a result, I have already spent a lengthy period of time with the participants and therefore, I am able gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and the experiences of the participants.

3.4 SAMPLING AND SITE- SELECTION

Nieuwenhuis (2008) postulates that sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for study. On the other hand, Durrheim (2006) explains sampling as the selection of research participants from an entire population, which involves decisions about which people, setting, events, behaviours, and/or social processes to observe. Due to the fact that qualitative research requires data to be collected, to be rich in description of people and place Fouché and Delpont (2005),

sampling occurs subsequent to establishing the circumstances of the study Strydom & Delpont (2005).

3.4.1 The Research Site

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) explain site selection as a site selected to locate people involved in a particular event.

Situated about ± 10 km on the Free State side of the Vaal River is the selected prison. This institution, forgotten by time and technology, comprises both a maximum and medium security facilities. The site selected to conduct the study was one cell in one of the South African prisons. The cell, excluding the toilet and shower, measures 13 x 5 meters in size. The lockers are situated at the back of the cell, and each student is allocated a locker. For extra storage space, the students use cardboard boxes which are stored beneath the beds. Sixteen steel framed beds are arranged in such a way that it is able to accommodate a table next to the bed. Four beds are arranged as bunk beds (one on top of the other) in order to provide sleeping space for all the occupants. Each student has a living space no larger than 2 x 2,5 meters. There are 17 tables shared by 20 students.

The tables resemble 'school tables' namely, steel frame with wooden tops no larger than 600mm X 600mm. There are only ten chairs in the cell, and where there are tables but no chairs, the bed, with its rather thin worn-out spongy mattress, doubles as a chair. The bunk beds present a problem when both students want to use the table and chair at the same time. The use of the table and chair in this situation becomes a process of negotiation.

3.4.2 The Participants

Maree and Petersen (2008) contend that it is impossible to include the entire population in your study. On the other hand, Wassenaar (2006) explains that the population selected for the study should be those to whom the research question applies. Kelly (2006) is of the view that when qualitative researchers are researching a rare phenomenon [such as the experiences of undergraduate incarcerated students], the

challenge becomes one of finding appropriate cases. The decision about how many cases is enough also depends, in part, on how many details one is likely to gather in each case.

The study made use of purposive sampling. The decision to use the purposive sampling method was to obtain information-rich participants. Purposive sampling decisions are not restricted to the selection of participants but also involve the setting, incidents, events and activities to be included for data collection Nieuwenhuis, (2008). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) explain that purposive sampling is a strategy to choose small groups or individuals likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest. Based on my knowledge, interaction, and observations of the students inside and outside of the cell, I have selected five participants for the study. Since the purpose of the study is not to generalize findings, but to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, I have selected **five (5)** participants and have used the following criteria for the selection of participants:

- ✓ Participants must be registered for the current academic year at a higher education institution studying towards an undergraduate qualification such as a degree or diploma. This is done to ensure that the data collected is valid in terms of students who are currently studying and the phenomenon under investigation is common to all the participants;
- ✓ Participants must have completed at least the first level/first year modules successfully. This criterion relates to the selected participants to ensure that they are rich in data, and would be able to relate this experience to the study;
- ✓ Participants must have written examination last year irrespective of the result. This is so that they can relate this experience to the study; and
- ✓ Participants must be serving their sentence at the selected prison while incarcerated.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) are of the view that because the experience [in a phenomenological study] is common to the researcher and the interviewees, data are

drawn from both the researcher's written records of his or her experience and records of the interviewees. The report includes a description of each participant's experience, including the researcher's, followed by a composite description and essence of the experience.

3.5.1 Interviews

Research interviews are but one of many types of interviews, all of which assume that the individuals' perspective is an important part of the fabric of society and of our joint knowledge of social processes and of all human condition (Henning 2009).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2008), qualitative researchers differentiate between open-ended (sometimes referred to as unstructured), semi-structured and structured interviews. An open-ended interview takes the form of a conversation with the intention that the researcher explores with the participant their ideas, beliefs and attitudes about a certain phenomenon. An open-ended interview spreads over a period and consists of a series of interviews.

The semi-structured interview is commonly used in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. It uses pre-determined questions and an interview schedule, which defines the line of inquiry.

In the structured interview, questions are detailed and developed in advance much as they are in survey research.

I have decided to use open-ended phenomenological interviews as a means of collecting data, as this will elicit the participants' experience, views and beliefs of their lived experience. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) express the view that phenomenological interviews permit 'multiple meanings' of an experience.

The individual in-depth phenomenological interviews will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, and to explore the meaning the participants attach to their experiences as incarcerated undergraduate students. Open-ended questions allow respondents to communicate their experiences or opinions about

specific issues in their own words, without any restrictions. Responses can vary from a couple of lines to an essay or two pages Kanjee, (2006).

Phenomenological interviews may be a single comprehensive interview with each participant or three separate interviews with each participant McMillan and Schumacher (2006), Seidman (1998) cited in Greeff (2005). It was the initial plan to use the three separate interviews with each participant, but after the first interview, I experienced mechanical failure with the tape recording device and decided to use one long interview with each participant, as I will explain later.

In conducting the interviews, I had to negotiate a time and a venue with each participant. I piloted the three separate interviews with another student who was not part of the study. I transcribed these interviews to satisfy myself that I was capable of conducting and transcribing the interviews. Participant no 3 was the first to avail himself for the interviews. I conducted three interviews with him and transcribed the interviews. As I was conducting the interview with participant no 5, the tape-recording device failed to work. All attempts to find another tape-recording device failed and the mini hi-fi in the education office was utilized as a last resort. Negotiating the use of the mini hi-fi was time-consuming effort which I feel caused unneeded delay.

As soon as the educationist had given permission to use the mini hi-fi, with his strict conditions and specific dates, I informed the remaining participants. The participants agreed to continue with the study, but only if they were to be interviewed once. This meant that I had to change the interview strategy from three separate interviews to one long interview.

The interviews with participants no. 2, 4 and 5 were conducted in the office of the educationist. Participant no. 1 did not want to be tape recorded for fear of intimidation by the prison officials as he is a gang member. The interview of participant no. 1 was, therefore, recorded manually over a period of two days in the bathroom of the cell. The interview guide can be found in appendix C.

3.5.2 Observation

Nieuwenhuis (2008) explains observation as ‘the systematic process of recording the behaviour patterns of participants, objects, and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. Observation is an everyday activity whereby we use our senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) - but also our intuition- to gather bits of data’. Kelly (2006) agrees, stating, “observation takes place while things are actually happening, and thus you get closer to the action. Since the interpretive approach emphasizes studying phenomena in a naturalistic way, observation most often takes the form of participant observation, where the researcher becomes fully involved on the setting being studied”.

Observation is an essential data-gathering technique Nieuwenhuis (2008) and as such, participant observation in a phenomenological study is important as the researcher endeavours to gain an in-depth insight into the manifestations of reality Strydom (2005). Nevertheless, Strydom (2005) further expresses that reliability and validity may become a concern for researches engaging in participant observations in that it is impossible to arrange the exact same situation in order to achieve the same result.

Kelly (2006) notes that students of psychology employed visual sense as a way of understanding social psychology. The purpose of the observational data in this study is to give me a better understanding of the phenomenon as perceived by the participants. The observations included their interaction with others students inside the cell and especially their reactions with the educationist. I especially observed the participants’ reaction in stressful situations, and whatever may be of value to enhance the data. While observing the participants in their ‘natural setting’, I made field notes, observing the events as they unfolded, recording dates, time and events ensuring that as much detail as possible is recorded (see Appendix F).

My observation entailed watching and recording how the students go about their daily lives with specific focus on their studies. It involved keeping an account of the activities of the participants in the study. I also observed how students prepared for the

study session to begin. The cell became quiet as each individual settled down getting their books ready to work. During this time, there is limited movement in the cell. Each study session lasted for three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. Sometimes, the students expressed their anger at the situation, especially during winter months when it was cold.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Nieuwenhuis (2008) maintains qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretive philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. This is best achieved through a process of inductive analysis of qualitative data where the main purpose is to allow research finding to emerge. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006) express the view that in a qualitative study, there is no clear point at which data collection stops and analysis begins. Rather, there is a gradual fading out of the one and a fading in of the other. This view is shared by Henning (2009) stating that qualitative analysis takes place throughout the data collection process.

Data analysis was a manual process, and as early as possible, after every interview, the audio tapes were transcribed. Audio tapes were transcribed verbatim, that is, rewritten word for word Nieuwenhuis (2008). When all the tapes were transcribed, I listen to the audio-tapes while reading the transcript to familiarize myself with the raw material.

I proceeded to analyse the raw material, namely, the transcripts and the observation schedules, using content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content Nieuwenhuis (2008) while it is also the preferred choice of novice researchers because it is easy to access and works on one level of meaning, the content of data text Henning (2004).

I left a margin on the left side and on the right side of the interview sheet for reflective notes and observation, and coding respectively. After rigorous intimidation of the transcript, I coded the transcripts.

Using a method of open coding whereby the codes are selected according to what the data mean to researcher Henning (2004) I set out to code the data. Henning (2004) also maintains that open coding is an inductive process. After the data was coded, I grouped it together to form categories, which gave rise to various themes.

Throughout this process, I constantly noted my own reflections, drawing comparisons on what I observed, my personal experience and what I read in the transcripts. Grouping of categories into themes captured the essence of the lived experience of inmate - students learning behind bars. The raw data are direct quotes from the inmate - students using their voices and words to describe their experience.

3.7 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Nieuwenhuis (2008) maintains that trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in qualitative research. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, I used the following strategies:

- Prolonged and persistent field work: I spent a lengthy period of time with the participants and obtained data through engagement based on trust and good rapport, thereby being able to understand their life-world;
- Member checking: the transcribed interviews were given to the participants for comments and for confirmation of findings;
- Interviewing process: where possible, interviews were tape-recorded, and all interviews were transcribed by me; and
- Triangulation: in data gathering, the study used more than one data collection method, that of interviews and participant observation.

3.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

Strydom (2005) defines ethics as “a set of widely accepted moral principles that offer rules for and behaviour expectations of, the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors other researches assistants and students”. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) a credible research design

does not only involve the selecting of informants and effective research strategies, but also adhering to research ethics.

It often happens that consent is negotiated with a gatekeeper, and this is regarded by the gatekeeper as sufficient Kelly (2006). However, permission was obtained from the individual participants as well as the head office of DCS. According to Wassenaar (2006) the standard components of consent are (a) provisions of appropriate information, (b) participants competence and understanding, (c) voluntariness in participating and freedom to decline or withdraw after the study has started, and (d) formalization of the consent, usually in writing. Keeping in line with the 'components of consent' in ethics, I obtained permission from the 'gatekeeper' namely, the Head of the Corrections Centre, and also obtained informed consent from the participants. All the participants, as well as the 'gatekeeper', were informed about the topic as well as the purpose the study, that is, for the culmination of a research report and for the possible publication of an article in a journal (with the permission from the university and the supervisor).

Participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, namely Participant 1(P1); Participant 2(P2) and so forth. I ensured that the participants understand their power in relation to the study, in that whatever information they regard as personal and intrusive, they need not disclose if they are not comfortable in doing so, while they understand that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

All participants were treated with respect, fairness and kindness.

3.9 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

In qualitative research, the researcher is directly involved in the setting, interacts with the people, and is the instrument Delport and Fouché (2005). These authors quote Rossman and Rallis (2003) as state that the researcher spends time on the field, looking, asking, listening and reading. The researcher interprets events, activities, conversations and objects and constructs his/her own meaning or understanding of them (*ibid*). These authors further explain that no qualitative report can exclude the researcher's own

perspective, and consideration should be given to how that might have shaped events and interpretation.

A research role, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) is a relationship acquired by and ascribed to the researcher in interactive data collection, appropriate for the purpose of the study. These authors contend that possible roles are: complete observer, full participant observer, insider observer, interview and the dual role of participants- researcher.

Defining my role in the study proved to be an extremely difficult task. Undoubtedly, the state of my incarceration raised many eyebrows, casting a fair amount of scepticism over the study. Authors such as Morgan (1999) and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (2004) challenged the “credibility of prisoners” as valid sources of data. Public perception in general question the credibility of prisoners.

However, looking beyond the scepticism that may or may not exist, I am incarcerated, a student registered for a higher degree at a University, and by virtue of my studies, a novice researcher. The role I therefore assumed was that of ‘participant-researcher’. As such I subscribed to research ethics by assuring that the dignity of human participants is respected, and is not abused or violated in the search for knowledge, scientific progress, or more mundanely, for career advancement Wassenaar (2006).

I obtained permission from the gate-keepers to conduct the study. The process of obtaining permission was a tedious process which, at times, left me despondent (see Appendix A for permission forms). After careful selection of the participants, permission to be part of the study was obtained from them individually (See Appendix B for permission forms).

I recorded the interviews using an electronic tape recorder where possible and transcribed the interviews myself. Finding a quiet place to conduct the interviews was a process of negotiation. Before each interview, I explained to each participant their rights with regards to the interview, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited in that it only focussed on the learning experience of five participants concentrating on their current situation, motivating factors, support and challenges they encounter. The five participants are inmates at one Corrections Centre, who are studying at Higher Education level towards a University qualification.

The study also only focused on undergraduate students. Given the sample size and the amount of data collected, generalising the result of the study would not warrant any validity.

3.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I explained the research process. The research approach that was used in the study namely a qualitative paradigm based on an interpretivist approach. I motivated my choice for the use of this paradigm and then went further to explain the research design indicating phenomenology as the preferred choice.

This chapter also gave a brief description of the site in which the participants reside and explained the criteria used to select the participants. I then proceeded to explain in detail the data collection methods that were used and the problems that were encountered. The unit of data analysis is explained as well as the process of data analysis. The methods used were to ensure trustworthiness of the study, are explained.

I explained in detail how I adhered to the research ethics, and my role as researcher was explained and. Finally, the limitations of the study were outlined.

In the next chapter, I present the data analysis and synthesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports an analysis and synthesis of the data that was gathered from the participants during the interviews and observations.

According to Strydom (2005) in this section of the report, the researcher must convey to the reader, participants and any other interested groups that the data were competently analysed and must tell the reader what was found. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) express the view that the hallmark of qualitative research is the narrative presentation of evidence and the diversity of visual representations. As such, data are presented as quotations of participants' actual language for evidence-based inquiry. Merriam (1998) maintains that categories and subcategories or properties are most commonly constructed through constant comparative method of data analysis. The researcher continuously compares the participant's remarks with each other, sorting units of data into groupings that have something in common.

In the next section, I present the data by first providing a short background on each participant, thus giving a mental picture of the participant and his experience. I use quotations made by the participants, using their own words. This is done so the reader can form a sense of empathy towards the participants. I then proceed to provide a narrative of the research findings combining and grouping codes.

4.2 THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF STUDYING BEHIND BARS

What follow is a discussion of each participant and their experience of learning behind bars. This is done to assist the reader in understanding the nature of the findings. In this section, I have provided pseudonyms for each participant which corresponds to the course he is studying.

4.2.1 The Lawyer (participant 1)

The lawyer indicates that he is irritated by his surroundings the lawyer has been in prison for many years now, 15 years to be exact. He finds the prison environment to be a hostile environment, and being a gang member, he has had numerous altercations with prison authorities, indicating that the prison officials once beat him up.

“The prison officials once beat the xxxx (swears) out of me because I am a gang member”.

Realizing that he has a second chance in life, an opportunity to change his life as he indicated:

“... he wanted to change to be a better person for his children, his parents, and himself..”

He made a choice to study, expecting that it would not be easy as he explains:

Prison is not designed for studying. It was built to punish and house convicted criminals. It's ok for someone to study but they must know it's for their own baby. You do it for yourself....Once I was beaten and taken to isolation cells two days before exams... I had to cancel exams.

When asked about the support that the prison offers to incarcerated students, he sarcastically exclaims, “I was not aware that they offered support... they let you struggle with everything”. “Prison officials have a shit attitude towards inmates, especially if you are studying. They make comments like this is not a university...”

He also indicated that he does not have support in his studies from outside except from his children who continue to encourage his study in order to change his life around.

4.2.2 The Scientist (participant 2)

The prison experience of the scientist is one that is characterized by an environment that is unhygienic and unhealthy caused by large amounts of dust. He contends that gangsterism and gang fights are the order of the day. He explains that during these gang fights, he is affected emotionally and psychologically, leaving him to feel helpless and useless.

When this gangsters fighting, I'm affected psychologically and I can't cope with my studies because when these gangsters are fighting, the police [prison officials] lock us up, and I can't do whatever I wanted to do.

The participant sees the prison as “not good to correct offender behaviour” and explains that the choice to study was one of “self-rehabilitation”. Like all participants in the study, he also faces challenges when it comes to his studies. The scientist acknowledges that the prison only provides some form of support to his studies in that the prison has made provision for a cell, where the higher education students reside.

When asked the question as to how the prison supports his studies, his response was:

The prison does not add any value in my studies. They are doing nothing. Nothing at all instead things are delaying from university, the post office is delaying, police officials do not want to help us. Nothing the prison is doing for us, for our studies.

Although the scientist has been in prison for almost 11 years, his motivation to study comes from his desire to live a crime-free life, find employment and support his children when he gets out:

“...I want to live a crime free life and support my children. All in all I'm 11 years in prison and I'm doing 16 years...”

4.2.3 The Human Resources Officer (participant 3)

Having had the opportunity to work prior to his incarceration, the Human resource officer knows the value that a good education and quality qualification can have in the business world. He, however, maintains that “prison has never been conducive to anyone and that it is hard and difficult for each and every inmate in prison”.

Realizing that there are challenges with his studies and that the prison environment is not conducive, the Human resource officer finds it difficult to study, specifically during the winter months.

Besides the fact that prison itself has never been conducive to anyone and that it's really difficult for all of us here, it's even worse in winter. It's hard to study because of the cold, and if you are cold, then your concentration is gone then the only thing you can do is to study under the blankets and that makes you tired and you can even fall asleep.

The Human Resource Officer feels that although noise and an anti-learning culture are problems, these are overcome by the support he receives both from the prison authorities and his family. He feels that the prison supports his studies because the prison authorities have allocated a cell for the students, and also in that the prison posts the assignments of students and collects their study material

“...the prison itself supports the studies because they have allocated a cell...posting of assignments, collection of study materials that is how they are supporting us...”

Human Resource Officer enjoys his studies and attaches great value to it. He sees his studies as a part of his self-rehabilitation process and wants to give back to the community as he puts it, “... to study so that I can develop and give back to community”. The participant remains committed to changing his life around and hopes for a better future upon his release.

4.2.4 The Auditor (participant 4)

The auditor does not find the prison environment as effective but believes that depends on the individual to decide to change his behaviour.

“...I believe it is not that much effective...”

To maintain a positive attitude in an environment that is characterized by violence and hostility takes a unique and special type of person. Despite his dire situation, the auditor finds prison transforming.

Prison experience has been a very much transforming experience considering the fact that I'm deprive my freedom...I'm not even close to my family...I don't eat what I want, I don't get what I want at the time I want it.

The auditor does, however, not believe that the prison environment is effective in the rehabilitation of inmates saying that “... it depends on the individual whether he wants to change and have his behaviour corrected”.

The auditor is the only participant in this study who is employed in prison. He is a facilitator at the ABET school and finds this task very rewarding and fulfilling.

Pursuing a B.Com Internal Auditing degree, he is motivated by the prospects of one day ploughing back into the community. He states:

“I have chosen this field of study because I have heard that there is a scarcity of auditors and accountants in South Africa. Then I have looked at myself and said since there is this scarcity I can perhaps fill the gap, and then contribute in helping my country to reach its dreams.”

The auditor is motivated to study because of the financial benefits of a better life and wants to live a crime free life. As with all students, who were interviewed challenges

and disruptions do occur. He accepts that the challenges in his studies are due to his situation. He explains a delay in study material.

Ah! those delays originate mainly from the fact that I'm in prison. I can't get what I want at the time that I want it. I'm made to understand that a courier should take less one day, not even more than two days, but there is a challenge in prison. A courier can even take five days to reach me.

The Auditor is grateful for the financial and moral support he receives from his family, saying, "...I really appreciate the support I'm getting from my parents". He also believes that the students residing in the cell which is meant for studying inmates encourage each other and share the same vision.

Everyone who is studying in prison with an institution of higher learning is housed there so am I... we encourage each other and we can have enough time to concentrate on our studies since we are all sharing one objective which is to study.

Despite the challenges, he remains committed to his studies, "...my studies mean everything to me... I can't imagine my future without having acquired the necessary degree".

He continues to explain that he wants to be a better person after his release and live a crime-free life and contribute positively into his community.

4.2.5 The Communications Officer (participant 5)

Studying towards a BA Communication Science degree, the Communications Officer feels that prison is what you make it to be. He contends, "it depends on your view and choices you make whilst here". He acknowledges that prison is a difficult place to be, admitting that he gave up on life when he was sentenced to prison "... I was just distressed and gave up, thinking that I will die here."

His motivation to study comes from advice given to him by one of his friends, while a family member, his grandmother inspired him as she realised that he has the potential to write good speeches.

The communications officer does not find the prison environment conducive for studying, citing noise and an anti-learning culture as the main barriers to his studies. Spiritual and emotional support is important to him, and he finds it difficult to study when these are lacking. The situation becomes compounded by the anti-learning culture displayed by fellow students. He explains...

Not all of us are taking our studies very seriously and sometimes someone will reason that if I don't feel like studying you cannot make or force me to study... and then they will always interfere in a way which will always impact negatively to you when you feel like studying in any case.

He experiences isolation when it comes to the course he is studying. He states that he has not found anyone doing the same course that he is doing, and that this is the third prison he has been transferred to.

...I found no one doing the same course that I'm doing... I have to struggle alone with all the modules offered as and challenges that go with it, such as assignment's and access to tutorial letters.

For incarcerated persons, studying by yourself can be extremely lonely, especially when you are told by prison authorities that they cannot offer any assistance to your choice of studying... "When you are doing external studies not offered by the prison, it's your entire baby to take care of. They cannot help you with anything".

The Communications officer acknowledges that a life of crime does not pay and wants to give back to the community. Having been raised in a community contaminated with crime, he hopes to change the misconception of the bad role models that criminals have become and wants to make documentaries to do this. With his eye on a production

company, he wants to empower the youth as he puts it: “... One thing on my mind is to help the youth because I have realised that there are many youth with potential, but lack channels to showcase their talent...”

4.3 EMERGING THEMES

Following the qualitative analytical process of inductive coding Nieuwenhuis (2008) three main themes emerged during which constant comparative analysis and interpretation was used. The themes that emerged from the analytical process are in the table below:

Table 1: Emerging themes (codes/categories)

| |
|--|
| <p>THEME 1: PRISON ENVIRONMENT (sub-themes) -hostile, volatile -not conducive -gangsterism/lock-downs</p> |
| <p>THEME 2: IMPACT ON EDUCATION -anti learning culture -attitude of officials -support -communication</p> |
| <p>THEME 3: MOTIVATING AND VALUE FACTORS -improvement of self -family -employment opportunities</p> |

4.3.1 Theme 1: Prison environment (hostile; gangsterism/lock-down; not conducive)

The mundane routine of prison was disrupted by a late afternoon search of the cells. Prison officials rush into the cells unannounced ordering inmates to queue outside the cells. Outside, we are ordered to take up a squat position with our heads facing downwards. Dog handlers enter the cells, and when they come out, officials enter to search. We are called into the cell two by two to open our lockers.

When the search is over, we are allowed back into the cells. Once inside, I notice that beds have been turned up-side-down, books, clothing and eating utensils are scattered all over the place as if a whirl-wind has passed through the cell. Inmates are careful not to step onto their possessions as they start arranging the cell to make it liveable for themselves. Although an unexpected event, it is an all too familiar occurrence within the prison routine. Inmates can expect to be stopped and searched any time. Inmates can also be transferred to other prisons, have their possessions seized or confiscated without reason and even be denied access to, for example, the telephone, the hospital and so on, at the discretion of the prison officials. This is the type of environment to which inmates are subjected to, an environment which is supposed to correct offender behaviour.

The prison environment exerts a large amount of influence on the inmates, especially in adapting to the prison conditions. As the participants indicated:

The prison environment is hostile... you have to constantly watch your back especially if you are a gang member...no more Mr nice guy (P1).

... Prison has never been conducive to anyone... it's difficult for each and every inmate in prison... it's not a place for human beings ...as they have structured it to be, but it's for punishment... (P3).

...whenever there is a gang fight the prison has to close up...then that itself has a negative impact on me (P4).

Some inmates spend many years in this small prison community which is removed from normal society:

I was serving a maximum sentence but have been classified a medium prisoner (P3).

I was in prison from 2000 until now. All in all I'm 11years in prison and I'm doing 16 years (P2).

The data also revealed that inmates face ridicule from the prison officials, who are the very people who are meant to protect, serve and help rehabilitate them so that they can become better people:

Most prison official have an fxxx (swears) attitude towards inmates especially if you are studying. They often remark that this is prison and not a university maybe they fear that we will become smarter than them... it is not my fault if they don't study but their own laziness (P1).

Then I have to write a request and then the request, it is subject to approval and disapproval. Then can't you see that my studies depends on the MOOD of someone else as to whether he decides to approve the request or disapproves it (P4).

The police officials at maximum they were helping us a lot [compared to] the ones here in medium (P2).

Within the prison environment, the inmates are not in control of their daily activities. They are subject to the rules and regulations set down by the prison officials but also to lock-downs caused by gangsterism.

... in prison I have witnessed many gang related fights, sometimes you are locked up, you have an appointment with a lecture...I'm deprived my freedom...I don't get what I want at the time I want it...(P4)

They treat you like children but expect you to behave like adults...The prison officials once beat the xxx [swears] out of me because I am a gang member (P1).

The participants all feel that prison; albeit a socially accepted institution, is not a nice place to be and that it is not conducive for human habitation. These findings confirm what Grey (2007:2) noting that it is a hostile environment designed for containment and

punishment. Prison does, however, serve the purpose of deterring inmates from a life of crime.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Impact on education/challenges (Anti-learning culture; attitudes of officials; support).

Hardly a week has passed by after the examinations, and already, the students in the study cell are completing registration forms for the second semester registration. These are year calendars and information brochures informing them about codes and modules are shared among themselves. Although the closing date for second semester registrations is still far away, these students are all too familiar with the delays caused by the postal services and the internal structures of DCS. The following morning one of the students stood at the cell window and called to the educationist to come and collect their registration forms. The educationist waves his hand indicating that he will return a little while later. The students start blowing off steam accusing the educationist of not having their interest at heart. Almost immediately, they start swearing and cursing. A state of anxiousness and frustration can clearly be seen on the faces of the students. There is nothing they can do except wait. As soon as the cell door opens, the students all rushed to the office of the educationist to hand in the forms so that he can post or take them to the nearest satellite campus. The students breathed a sigh of relief in the hope that their registration forms will reach the institution on time for the second semester.

Within the prison environment, the students are dependent on DCS staff members, especially the educationist, to assist them with their studies. Without this invaluable help from the educationist who is responsible for assisting the students, their studies will not proceed smoothly. The students depend on the educationist to assist them when they need help, for example, if the students need to fax, use the phone (for study purposes) or post assignments.

...I have to write a request [to use the phone] and then it is subjected to approval and disapproval, (P4).

...I need to contact my lecturer, I should make a request and the request should be to our unit manager so that he can approve our request... I must get my own escort that will take me to the phone (P2).

Failing to obtain the necessary help from the educationist, the students turn to other DCS officials for help. However, this much needed help is not always available.

... the thing is when coming to work, some of them they do not do their work effectively and efficiently that makes it hard for us because now and then we need help, we cannot do things for ourselves without their help...(P3).

There is also evidence that suggests that within this prison environment, the prison does provide some form of support for student inmates. At this particular prison, provision is made for student inmates to help them cope with their special study needs. The prison provides a cell for students who are studying at tertiary level as one participant indicated:

The cell is called C 6... Everyone who is studying in prison with an institution of higher learning is housed there, so am I. Basically that cell serves like a residence (P4).

Although the prison does provide support to the students, there are those who feel the prison does not provide any support. The lawyer feels that support from prison is “non-existent”.

Within these living arrangements, the inmates residing in this cell organise themselves so that they can be able to live in harmony, as the communications officer indicated, saying:

“We have set our own rules and study times”.

This view is supported by the human resources officer who states:

“We have worked out times to study in the morning; it’s from 9 am to 12 pm and then again from 4pm to 7pm”.

Although there are those who study, some student inmates also display a culture of anti-learning, and this causes a disturbance in the cell.

... you can never find it very optimal to study. There are many noises, disturbances internally and externally sometimes... internal noise which you cannot avoid ... the external noises you cannot avoid... Inmates have a tendency to say this is prison (P5)

When participant no 1 was asked about how the prison supported him in his studies, his response was:

“Prison is not designed for studying”.

The communication officer

“...not all of us are taking our studies very seriously...”

The sounding of the afternoon bell signals the end of another day in prison. Inmates hurry to their cells to be counted, the final count of the day and then be locked away. It is 3pm, and for the next fifteen hours, inmates will be locked-up in the cells. For the students in the study cell, it is an opportunity to study. All the participants indicated that the cell has been allocated for students studying at higher education level such as a FET college or a university. The students have compiled a set of rules which is followed by every occupant in the cell. The study times are from 4pm to 7pm, then again from 9pm to 6am. During the day, study times are from 9am to 12pm. The students have an arrangement with the prison authorities not to switch the lights off at night.

Within this process of self–rehabilitation, the students face numerous challenges. Noise is a major concern for those students.

...the noise in the cell is something that affects me a lot, because sometimes I need to study and there a lot of noise there in my cell ... (P2)

Others are making noise out of the cell...that is causing a hindrance ... (P3)

Sometimes noise seems to be a challenge in itself, I mean you can't tell a person not to talk when he want to talk ... (P4)

There are many noises and disturbances both internally and externally:

...There are those whisperings and all the kind of stuff that will play as a barrier or noise to disturb your concentration (P5).

4.3.3 Theme 3 Motivation and value of studies (improvement of self; crime-free life; employment)

The last theme deals with the reflection of the participant in their experience of learning behind bars. All participants realise that they are given a second chance, an opportunity to study and gain some knowledge and an opportunity to improve their behaviour.

As already indicated by the auditor, the students in C-6 motivate one another, but some of these students find their motivation from beyond the prison walls.

The communication officer explains:

...I had a chat with my gran and then he told me that I was very good in jotting speeches. Then I thought that communication science will be best for me, so now I'm pursuing a BA communication science degree.

The human resources officer indicated:

“...besides that I read a book by John Maxwell which is about success which was very much motivational”.

Inspired by his “dream” the human resources officer remains committed to his studies.

The scientist is motivated by a childhood dream of one day becoming a doctor. He attaches great value to studies, indicating that he wants to live a crime-free life and wants to work so that he could support his children.

The auditor is motivated by the expectation of finding suitable employment and by the support he obtains from his parents. He is also motivated by regret of not having studied a long time ago.

4.4 **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the raw data that was obtained from the interview transcripts’ and the observation schedules is presented. The data was analysed by breaking it up into manageable segments and then putting it back together to form a comprehensive whole. During this process, the data was examined for differences and similarities, while I constantly reflected on my own experience of learning behind bars.

I also provided the reader with an exposition of each participant, indicating how they experience prison and the process of learning behind bars. The themes that emerged from the data are presented, discussing the main points. In this chapter, I also used findings by other researchers to corroborate the findings in the data. Contradictions in the data were shown and short-comings explained. I concluded this chapter by presenting emerging themes that emerged from of the data.

In the next chapter, I present a discussion on the findings. The data are interpreted, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter of the report serves as a synthesis of the study. It provides a discussion and an interpretation of the findings, as well as the conclusions that are drawn and recommendations are made. Strydom (2005) explains that the summary of the report serves two purposes: it summaries the main points and suggests the idea of finality to the reader. He further maintains that the report should conclude with a statement of what has been discovered about the subject matter and where future research might be directed. Finally, recommendations should be made based on conclusions, and these should be practical.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This section discusses the main findings according to the key themes in the study, namely, the prison environment, impact on studies and motivation factors. It also presents the shortcomings of the data and other relevant information to enrich our understanding.

5.2.1 Discussing the findings

a) Experiencing prison

The learning that occurs inside prison cannot be divorced from the context in which it occurs. Inmates spend many years as members of this isolated community and experience emotional, psychological, physical, social and intellectual development.

The data collected from the participants indicated that each one experienced the prison environment differently. These experiences range from “dislike to hate”, “ struggling to hostile” and comment made such as “... not a place for human being...” The participants

also indicated that they experienced emotional and psychological trauma even distress. These findings are in line with Frolander- Ulf and Yates (2001) and Greg (2007) who contend that prison is a naturally radicalizing environment designed for containment and punishment.

Prisons have and will always be shrouded with negative perceptions. One participant, however, found the prison environment hostile yet transforming. This is an indication that with the right frame of mind, adversity can be turned into prosperity. The participants in this study are aware of prison as a social system and might be motivated to conform to it or to challenge it. The responses indicate that the students find the prison environment to be belligerent and unfavourable for both studying and the rehabilitating of offenders. In this sense, the students had to adjust to the prison environment, its hostile conditions and then prepare themselves emotionally and psychologically for the wonderful experience of learning and obtaining an undergraduate qualification. The data reveal that those who study while incarcerated choose to challenge this social system and public perception that inmates should be denied access to educational opportunities Van Heerden (2011) McKay (1998).

b) Impact on learning

The findings of this study also indicated that the students residing in cell C-6 all study at higher education level. They use distance education as the preferred mode of study as their movement is restricted. This study indicates that incarcerated students are faced with many challenges, which is congruent with the findings of Van Heerden (2011) who indicated that studying in prison is challenging as it takes place in a difficult environment where learner needs can in many cases not be catered for.

The findings show that attempts are made by prison authorities in South African prisons to meet, albeit the very basic, needs of students by providing a place to study. The cell that has been allocated for the students unites them with one purpose, to obtain an undergraduate qualification. At the same time, their studies also separate them from the rest of the prison community.

Since schooling has been a painful experience for many inmates Weisel et al., (2005) many inmates display an anti-learning culture. There is evidence in this study that suggests that some prison officials also display an anti-learning culture at times, antagonizing students who study. Prison officials make comments such as, "...this is not a university (P1), or "...when you are doing external studies, it's your entire baby to take care of "(P5).

These types of comments and behaviour de-motivate the students. For these students to do well in their studies, they need all the support they can get from DCS, the educational institution and, where possible, their families.

Travis (2011) exclaims that incarcerated individuals are denied access to educational opportunities available to their counterparts. While the data showed that incarcerated students are able to access higher education, when they encounter problems and need to communicate with the educational institution, the telephone is the only and probably the quickest means of communication. For the participants of this study, communication with the university is a major challenge. The participants indicated that they have to follow a process of writing a request to the educationist or the unit manger to use the phone and then find an escort (prison official) to take them to the phone. The students who experience these difficulties confirm what Ashley et al. (1994) explain, saying students in prison are potentially disadvantaged in that they cannot easily initiate direct contact, have fewer tutorials session, cannot telephone the tutor and find it hard to avoid late submission of assignments. The participants make use of a public telephone (a pay phone) to contact the institution at which they are studying. The use of the state phone is not allowed.

Within the prison environment, there are also those inmates who do not attend school. Unwarranted noise from outside the cell, and in certain instances, inside the cell is cause for concern. For the students who reside in cell C-6, noise is another major challenge. Noise from outside the cell is something which the students are not able to control. The data has revealed that although the cell has a set of rules which guide the behaviour of the students, "because we have set our rules and study times..." (P2), there

are those students who digress from these rules. One participant indicated, "... noise in the cell is something that affects me a lot..." (P2), while another stated, "there is this whispering and all kinds of stuff... to disturb your concentration" (P5). These findings are in agreement with results of other studies which examined issues of corrections education Thomas (1995) Ashley et al., (1994).

The noise caused by some of the students does not mean that they do not take their studies seriously. The disturbances caused by individuals could be, as the auditor explained:

"... you should understand that we are from different background as such our background at the end of the day decides how we behave and conduct ourselves..."

The challenges encountered by the participants in this study are similar to those challenges encountered by other incarcerated students Van Heerden (2011) Travis (2011) Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001) Bayliss (2003) Ashley et al., (1994). However, none of the participants in this study indicated that they experience emotional or psychological stress due to events such as family crises, but that the stress they experience is caused by internal factors within the prison environment. What the data, however, revealed was that some individuals have support from beyond these prison walls "... I'm having wonderful parents, though they are all unemployed, but whatever means financially... they are trying to support me..." (P4), while others do not have that kind of support, "I don't really have support from outside. But then again I fend for myself here in prison" (P1). Some of the participants felt that the prison could do more to support them.

c) Motivation

Looking beyond the circumstances which led to the incarceration of these students, one needs to acknowledge that those who study in such adverse conditions must be extremely motivated. Besides being motivated, they must also be self-disciplined. Given the fact that "... this [prison] is not a nice place to be" (P2), and "it not a place for human beings..." (P3), the participants in this study acknowledge that they have an

opportunity to study, and they use it. Considering the factors that motivate the students, the data revealed that some participants were motivated by the prospects of a crime-free life. While I was unable to obtain literature on recidivism in the South African context, international research has shown that inmates who are studying while incarcerated have a lower chance of returning to prison Bayliss (2003) Frolander-Ulf and Yates (2001). For the students in this study, motivation came from aspects of regret: “I should have actually done this [study] long ago...” (P4). Other motivating factors included need to provide for their families, giving back to the community, and even fulfilling a childhood dream.

Within the prison environment, the students also motivate and support one another, as participant 4 explains, “we encourage each other and we can have enough time to concentrate on our studies since we are all sharing one objective which is to study”. This is evident in the manner in which they assist one another when for example, they share information, co-operate during study times and create a supportive learning environment in the cell. These finding is in line with those of Worth (1996) contending that inmates students help one another and at times, encourage each other.

The data also revealed the students who receive support from beyond the prison walls do better in their studies and are more motivated. I base this finding by comparing participant 1 with participant 4. Participant 1 indicated that he does not really get support from outside and that he is old; he questions: who is going to give him work with criminal record? In contrast, participant 4 states that he does have support from his parents and is looking forward contributing to his community. Both participants experience similar conditions.

d) Short-comings of the data

The results of this study may have been influenced by the Hawthorne effect. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), the Hawthorne effect occurs when the participants in the study act differently because they realize they are subjects in a study. They may become anxious, fake responses in order to look good, or react in many other ways because of their knowledge of aspects of the research.

To overcome the Hawthorne effect I engaged in informal conversations with the participants, during which they spoke candidly about the challenges, the joys, the support and the disappointments of their studies. They mentioned issues such as the late arrival of study material to the non-posting of assignments by DCS, even indicating that DCS does not give them any recognition for their studies. However, during the formal interviews, the participants failed to mention any of the issues discussed during informal conversations. It is possible that during the interviews, which were held in the office and in the presence of the educators, the participants may have felt intimidated.

There were also instances during which the data obtained from the participants contradicted itself. By way of example, participants 2 and 4 indicated that there are \pm eighteen students in the cell, while participants 1, 3 and 5 indicated that there are nineteen students in the cell. Another contradiction was in the amount of time allocated to the students to use the phone when it comes to academic matters. While all the participants indicate that they need to write a request to use the phone, participant 2 indicated that they are only allowed ten minutes on the phone, and participant 3 indicated that they have unlimited time.

Noticeably in the data was that all the participants were serving maximum sentences. The individual sentences and time spent in prison for each participant, respectively, are as follows: 29/15(P1); 16/11(P2); 15/6(P3); 24/10(P4) and 28/10(P5).

The data also revealed that all the participants felt that the study conditions were better in the Maximum section of the prison.

5.2.2 Interpretation of findings

As previously mentioned, the learning experience which occurs behind bars should be understood within the context in which it occurs.

The students who undertake undergraduate studies while incarcerated experience both internal pressure from within the prison environment and externally from the institution at which they study, and the family they left behind. When an offender gets sentenced

and sent to prison, he/she experiences emotional and psychological trauma as was my experience. Fear sets in, fear of an unknown world. Once inside, the inmates need to adapt to the prison environment without counselling or assistance from the prison officials. It becomes up to the individual inmate to see how he/she will survive as one of the participants in the study puts it, prison breaks you down and never builds you up.

Having made the decision to study, the participants in the investigation are all too familiar with the challenges they face in this hostile unfriendly environment. Accepting the challenges that come with studying at a higher educational institution via the process of distance learning, the students embark on a journey which could ultimately change the course of their lives. With the assistance of the educationist, the students are able to process their registrations while applying for financial assistance. This assistance from the educationist and the provision of cell C-6, where the students are housed, can be translated as the support that DCS provides for its students. However, more can be done on the part of DCS in assisting the students, especially when it comes to phoning the book shop, communication with the University and so forth.

In the free world there are public libraries, where students are able to access information while at the same time finding a quiet place to study. The students in prison do not have the luxury of a quiet library and when they need to study they experience noise to be a barrier to their studies. These students sacrifice their time after the prison is locked up, late nights and early mornings to help them cope with the demands of studying. Coupled with the problem of noise and the available time, the students have created a time-table to help them cope. This is an indication that the students are committed to making the best of the situation and can be understood as being dedicated to changing their behaviour which is in line with Bayliss (2003) who stated that through learning in prison, small incremental changes in behaviour and attitudes may occur. At the same time, Richards et al. (2008) confirm that former prisoners and parolees are high-performing students who are committed to their studies. The negative attitude displayed by the officials and the anti-learning culture that occurs inside prison unquestionably demotivates the students. These students continue with their studies, and it could, therefore, be understood that they are hungry for education.

Many studies suggest that recidivism rates are extremely high Bayliss (2003); Frolander and Yates (2001). Having received a maximum sentence, I spent six years in the maximum section on the prison. During this time, I have seen inmates being released from prison only to return a year later. When I reached medium security classification, I transferred to the medium section. I was horrified to find that so many inmates had returned to prison. Although not part of this study, I refer to this information to share some insight into recidivism rates in South Africa.

The participants in this study do not want to be part of the recidivism statistics. They are motivated to study, indicating that they want to live a crime-free life and support their families; it should, therefore, be understood from the data that inmates at the this South African Correction facility are able to undertake undergraduate studies which they hope will improve the quality of their lives.

It should, therefore, be understood that not all inmates are hardened criminals as most movies and stories show. While faced with many challenges, be emotional, psychological or physical, those inmates who choose to study want to better themselves. Understandably, it is not an easy task, but the dedication displayed by these students is evident. The students in this study see their learning experience as important and valuable to their rehabilitation process and their ticket to a crime-free life.

5.3 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Guided by the research question, the purpose of this study based in the qualitative paradigm was to gain an understanding of the experiences and challenges of undergraduate students, studying behind bars. The research site was a South African Correctional Centre.

It was evident from the findings that there has been a paradigm shift in the corrections environment from imprisonment and punishment to rehabilitation. The data clearly indicated that inmates are, indeed, able to study while incarcerated. These findings are in line with those of Mashego (2011); Van Heerden (2011), Travis (2011) and Ashley

et al. (1994). The participants in the study experienced the prison environment as hostile facing many challenges which impeded on their studies. These challenges included factors such as an anti-learning culture, unsupportive prison officials, noise and a lack of an effective means of communication with the University. These findings confirm findings by authors such as Bayliss (2003), Frolander Ulf and Yates (2001) and Thomas (1995).

The participants in the study felt that the prison authorities did not support them in their studies; this is despite the fact that the prison authorities provide a cell, some tables and chair for the exclusive use of the undergraduate students. The individual responses indicated that the students were dissatisfied with the support they received. On the surface, it appears that the students are content with the situation, but the prison environment impacts negatively on their studies. The anti-learning culture and negative attitudes of prison officials demotivate the students. However, within this environment and despite the hostile situation, the data showed that the students are motivated and committed. Some students motivate each other while others receive their inspiration from beyond the prison walls. Although lacking in adequately addressing the critical questions, but not altogether absent, the data provided sufficient evidence to answer the main research question.

The result of this study contributes and extends our knowledge of the learning experience of incarcerated person. The study complements the literature review covered earlier in chapter two. The participants all experience the prison environments as negative and indicate that this negativity has an impact on their studies. Having adjusted to the prison situation, they engage themselves in a self-rehabilitation process by undertaking undergraduate studies. In retrospect, the participants are aware of the benefits contained personally and professionally by this learning experience. The students attach great value to their studies and hope to use it to secure employment once released from prison. The value of this study lies in its unique setting, at a Corrections Facility where offenders are sent as a punishment for their crimes. The data produced in this study serves as evidence to show that not all inmates are illiterate, hardened criminals who do not want to danger their behaviour. In fact, it suggests the opposite

that inmates want to change their behaviour and need all the help and support they can find. Muth (2005:35) postulates that prisoners display an extremely diverse range of abilities and this study is an indication of such abilities. This study also highlighted the need of support for those studying in prison.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations of the current study situated in the qualitative paradigm, may not necessarily apply to all inmates/ students who are studying while incarcerated. The diverse nature of prisons and prisoners in our countries prisons makes it impossible to assume that the context or participants in the current study are representative of all South African prisons.

Acknowledging the effort made by these students in an attempt to ameliorate themselves and based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made, with regards to studying while incarcerated:

5.4.1 Every attempt should be made to encourage more offenders to take up the opportunity to study, be it vocational education, Adult education or even higher education.

5.4.2 For students accessing distance education, communication with the education institutions is vital, while postal delays cause undue stress. It is, therefore, recommended that these students be given access to internet facilities albeit with limited supervised access.

5.4.3 The educationist should set aside a specific day in the week where he/she will attend to the special needs of distance education students for example, assisting them with the phone, fax and/or e-mail facilities.

5.4.4 Where possible, it is recommended that a special unit or section be allocated to students in prison. Only inmates who are studying should be allowed to reside there.

Within these units there should control in terms of noise, access by other offenders, study times and so forth.

5.4.5 For incarcerated students who display positive attitude towards self-rehabilitation, rehabilitation and the willingness to become better individuals, support from within the prison environment must be made available. This support on the part of DCS should include special incentives such as early parole or any other form of recognition for these students.

5.4.6 While the participants in the study indicated that they would like to use their undergraduate qualifications to secure employment, there is the concern of a criminal record as mentioned by one of the participants. In dealing with the stigma of a criminal record and living with the consequences of having been incarcerated, DCS should assist students in helping them find suitable employment be it within DCS or any other government department, thereby promoting the image of DCS by showing the general public that rehabilitation within the Department of Correctional Services is effective.

5.4.7 The information provided by this study, in combination with previous research findings, could be used by prison authorities in addressing the immediate educational needs of inmates. It could be used to design and develop specific programmes and policies within DCS that will minimize disturbances in the study programmes, encouraging more inmates to use this time for educational development.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was limited in that it only investigated students in one prison. It is, therefore recommended that further research be conducted at other Correction Centres across South Africa, to determine the learning experiences of other inmates. Since the findings of this study indicated that the participants want to find employment when released, it is suggested that research be done to investigate and determine how many ex-offenders with undergraduate and/or post-graduate qualifications find suitable employment when

released. Future studies could include an investigation into recidivism rates of undergraduate and/or post-graduate ex-offenders.

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APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY AT A SOUTH AFRICAN
PRISON

Christopher Moore
Address omitted
07 April 2011

The Head of Corrections
The Senior Educationist
name and address of prison omitted

To whom it may concern

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I am a student at the University of South Africa, student no. (omitted). Currently I have registered for the degree **Master of Education – specializing in Curriculum Studies** (MED 97292).

To fulfil the requirements of the degree, I have to conduct research in the field of education. The research will culminate into the completion of a Dissertation (of limited scope) code DIS971B, and the possible publication in an academic journal. I would like to conduct research at (prison name omitted) and hereby ask for permission to conduct such research. The focus of the research project is on the “experiences of incarcerated persons studying at undergraduate level”.

The study is in no way a threat to the security of the Corrections Centre and I would be prepared to share the requirements of my research project with you. I also make an application for the use of a tape recorder, which will be used for the recording of interviews of the participants, as this is one of the data collection tools. Please find attached a copy of the Research proposal.

Thank you very much for helping me reach my goal – it is valuable to me as a student and educator to be able to take responsibility for my professional development and the development of various aspects of Curriculum Studies and the larger South African community.

You are welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor M. L. Mokhele at (012) 429-4542 if you would like more information about the goals and outcomes of the Master’s degree.

Thank you kindly.

Christopher Moore
Master of Education student

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTERS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

Christopher Moore
Unit C, Cell 6
07 April 2011

Dear Participant

I am currently doing Educational Research on the Experiences of incarcerated person's at the Prison. The research will culminate in the completion of a dissertation for obtaining the degree MASTER OF EDUCATION.

I regard you as an information rich, reliable and valuable source of data, which will help to answer the research question. The research question is formulated as follows: What are the experiences of undergraduate students at the Prison?

I would be prepared to share the requirements of the research project with you. Interviews will be conducted with the participant. As a data collection tool, all interviews will be tape-recorded. All participants will be given a pseudonym and confidentiality is ensured.

Thank you very much for helping me reach my goal – it is valuable to me as a student and educator to be able to take responsibility for my professional development and the development of various aspects of Curriculum Studies and the larger South African community.

Thank you very much for helping me reach my goal- it

Thank you kindly.

Christopher Moore
Master of Education student
University of South Africa
Student no. (omitted)

I.....herby agree to be part of the study.
(full name)

Statistical data

Proposed degree/diploma:.....

Number of modules completed in current study:.....

Length of sentence:.....

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE/PROTOCOL

NB – THIS INTERVIEW GUIDE WAS USED IN THE PILOT STUDY AND IN THE INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS NO 3.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1st INTERVIEW

Thank you for taking part in the study. The first interview is to determine the context of your situation and will be guided by the question: if you were tell me a story about your current situation what would you tell me?

- Tell me about the prison environment?
- Tell me about how you miss your family, the attitude of the prison officials, fellow inmates

2nd INTERVIEW

In the second interview tell me about your studies? The following questions will guide you.

- What are you studying?
- Why have you chosen this course?
- What motivated you to study?
- What are the challenges you face during the course of your studies?
- What are the joys of studying? e.g. a sense of achievement.
- What support mechanism do you have?
- Who supports you? How do they support you?

3rd INTERVIEW

In the third interview you must explain to me the meaning and value that you attach to you studies.

NB YOUR OWN IDEAS ARE VERY IMPORTANT

THANK YOU

INTERVIEW GUIDE- FOR INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS NO'S 1,2, 4 AND 5

THE INTERVIEW CONSISTED OF ONE LONG INTERVIEW

Thank you for taking part in the study. The research question: What are the experiences of undergraduate students at the Medium Corrections Centre? formed the departure point from which all interviews developed. All interviews started with question "Tell me a story about your prison experience?" This allowed the participant to explain to us the context of his situation. Depending on how the participant responded to the question, probing questions were formulated during the interview allowing me to extract information from the participants. Other main question included; can you take me through the daily routine of your prison life? What motivated you to study? What does your study mean to you? How does the prison environment impact on your studies?

- Tell me a story about your prison experience?"
- Tell me about how you miss your family, the attitude of the prison officials, fellow inmates
- What are you studying?
- Why have you chosen this course?
- What are the challenges you face during the course of your studies
- What are the joys of studying? e.g. a sense of achievement.
- What support mechanism do you have?
- Who supports you? How do they support you?

Can you take me through the daily routine of your prison life?

How does the prison environment impact on your studies?

What motivates you to study? What does your study mean to you?

NB YOUR OWN IDEAS ARE VERY IMPORTANT.

THANK YOU

APPENDIX D

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION SCHEDULES

APPENDIX F

MY EXPERIENCE OF STUDYING BEHIND BARS

MY PRISON EXPERIENCE

The essay is a reflection of my experience inside prison with particular focus on the phenomenon under investigation. In a phenomenological study, the experience is common to both the researcher and the participants, and data are drawn from both the researchers written record of his experience and records of the interviews McMillan and Schumacher (2006). Keeping in line with the principles of a phenomenological study, the purpose of the essay is to provide the reader with background information about myself, my view of the prison environment and the experience and challenges faced during studies.

At the tender age of 36, the prime of my life, I was arrested, convicted and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. The nature of the crime is not important as it has no bearing on the study. Prior to my incarceration, I was employed as a Physical Science teacher obtaining a Higher Education Diploma in 1996 and a Senior Primary Education Diploma in 1989. I had been teaching Physical Science for thirteen years with two years of Mathematics teaching experience.

Upon arriving at the Maximum Security Prison, I was bewildered and fascinated at the prison environment, and its events. In my opinion, the prison environment is fluid, hostile and extremely volatile. Even with its set routine no two days are the same inside the prison. The prison officials strip your rights as a human being, making you feel belittled, degraded, filthy, worthless and impressed on you, that you are nothing but a common criminal. You become vulnerable to the verbal, emotional and psychological abuse from both the prison officials and fellow inmates. I was shocked at dearth of rehabilitation which happens behind these high walls. If you were under the impression that prisons were places of rehabilitation for convicted criminals, you were wrong.

No amount of rehabilitation takes place as that which the individual inmates initiate him or her. You make a choice as an individual to ameliorate yourself and set processes in motion to achieve your goal. Within the prison environment nobody motivates or pushes you to do anything, you have to motivate yourself.

Guided by my love for teaching I decided to use this time to improve on my teaching qualifications and also to add on to my teaching experiences by teaching at the ABET School.

I secured myself teaching position at the ABET School but was horrified at the appalling conditions under which these learners attend school. Structurally, it resembles a school comprising of 4 classrooms, an office and a hall. The average class size was between 55

and 65 learners per class. The school hall was subdivided to accommodate 5 different class groups. The school provided teaching for grades 12 and 10, and ABET levels 1 to 4. The school faced challenges of overcrowding and is under resourced, both in terms of human resources and teaching and learning aids.

The lack of teaching and learning aids inspired me to seek help from my former school colleagues. At this time I also registered to do a (Honours) B.Ed degree at South Africa's largest Open and Distance Learning University.

The registration process was not without stumbling blocks. I had to seek help from family members to assist me with the necessary registration forms and year calendar, as the educationist in the prison alleges not to have those documents. I was also told by the educationist that "your tertiary studies are your business and the prison will only assist with the posting of assignments". I became discouraged and dismayed. This was only the first of many stumbling blocks.

I experienced problems with stationary and books that I ordered. The supplier had posted the material to me, an official had collected the material at the post office, but the material never reached me. After an investigation by myself which proved to be fruitless and without help from the DCS, I opened a charge of theft against the DCS. Hardly a month went by and I received news from the supplier that all stationary and books had been returned. The charges were subsequently withdrawn.

I also experienced problems when I wanted to phone the lecture of my study units. The educationist was never available to assist me with the phone. In the prison environment, if you want to make phone call, one needs to make a written application to do so. In instances where I would seek help from non-education staff member, I would receive hostile comments such as "why did you not study before you committed a crime, this is not a university".

Other challenges included finding quite space and time to study. Many inmates who do not study or attend school do not appreciate the value of education and become disruptive at times.

I also experienced fulfilling and joyful moments. When I passed an assignment and the examinations, I felt happy and proud of myself. When I completed the honours degree, I learnt that I was in fact the first inmate in the history of this particular prison to obtain a degree behind bars. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the graduation due to my incarcerated state.

Throughout my studies I have been supported by my family. I used part of my pension

funds to finance my studies. I later applied for financial aid and was partly assisted by NSFAS.

The prison impacted negatively on my studies and much help is needed especially from outside. The lack of adequate support from the educationist is demotivating. The help from the educationist is very important but unfortunately he will help you at his own convenience who may. While all other aspects of your imprisonment is decided for you, example, what to eat and wear, when to phone and to whom, the number of people who may visit you and what items may be received during visits, the most important, that of your rehabilitation is left up to the individual inmate.

During the study of this master's degree, I encountered numerous challenges such as registration deadlines, retrieving of research articles, to printing and issues such as lockdowns for up to two weeks at a time.