Exploring Prisoners' Communication Strategies with their Supervisors when Studying in E-Learning Mode: A Case of Namibia

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Abstract. This study delves into the communication strategies used by inmates when engaging in e-learning within the confines of a Namibian prison. Despite the challenging living conditions inherent in such environments, the research posits that inmates exhibit a strong motivation to pursue further education. The rise of e-learning has opened educational opportunities for diverse populations, including those incarcerated. In Namibia, prisoners have access to education through e-learning platforms, allowing them to pursue studies and gain qualifications. However, this mode of learning presents unique challenges, particularly in communication with supervisors. The objective was to understand the challenges faced by prisoners following higher education programs in communicating with their supervisors. Method: Data was collected through interviews, situated within an interpretive paradigm. The study focused on a sample of prisoners enrolled in e-learning programs in a Namibian correctional facility. Analysis: Verbatim transcripts of audio-recorded interviews were meticulously prepared by a skilled transcriber, offering the author a comprehensive material for interpretation. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Results: It was found that prisoners' communication strategies with their supervisors, amongst others, included communication via-email; telephonic communication; communication via the internet and online studies, as well as through in-person appointments. Furthermore, the study contextualized its findings within the evolution of Namibia's legal system, highlighting a significant shift from punitive measures towards a rehabilitative focus on corrections and community reintegration. Namibia's legal system is rehabilitative instead of being punitive. This transformation underscores the broader societal changes in attitudes towards incarceration and highlights the importance of educational initiatives within correctional facilities.

Keywords: communication; e-learning; student prisoner; supervisor; communication strategies

1. Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine prisoners' communication strategies with their supervisors when studying in e-learning mode. The paper's central claim is that, despite their severe living conditions, inmates who are committed to their education cannot have their education impeded by prison walls. This research was carried out in a prison in Namibia.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing demand for correctional facilities to establish programs that foster the development and enhancement of both physical and mental capabilities. The objective of these programs is to improve inmates' self-awareness and help them live a life that better conforms to societal norms (Wakai, 2024). Imprisonment within a correctional facility is used as a kind of retribution for individuals who have engaged in legal infractions. A crucial element while imprisonment is the undertaking of rehabilitating and reintegrating detainees. Rehabilitation and reintegration programs for incarcerated individuals vary across countries. The rehabilitation process involves a range of activities, such as offering educational opportunities to prisoners, allowing them to improve their academic qualifications. This enables them to strive towards becoming accountable and industrious individuals in society after they are released. Furthermore, it is imperative to enlist the aid of volunteers who can oversee or offer instruction in the specific academic areas where incarcerated people may be lacking.

The objective of the study was to evaluate the way prison students communicate with their supervisors while in custody. The major aim of the study was to improve communication and to determine what educational experiences could contribute to the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society, reducing recidivism rates and promoting social inclusion. The research questions are: "What communication strategies do prisoners in Namibia utilize when interacting with their supervisors during e-learning sessions?" and "How do these strategies facilitate or hinder their part educational progress within the prison environment?"

An important way to comprehend the dynamics of education in correctional facilities is to investigate how inmates communicate with their supervisors through e-learning. In these kinds of situations, communication is not only vital for academic advancement but also for creating a positive learning atmosphere and assisting with the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society. According to recent research, it is critical to address the particular difficulties that prisoners have getting an education and making the most of e-learning resources. Research by writers like Shoham and Haviv (2024) emphasizes that being used enhances released prisoners' reduction in recidivism rates and improves the prospects of ex-offenders.

Furthermore, Dewey et al.'s (2024) research from put emphasis on rehabilitative services focusing on fostering personal transformation by encouraging incarcerated individuals to consider themselves members of a broader community through positive forms of self-development. Recent research on the

communication tactics used by inmates has highlighted the need for digital literacy, adaptability, interpersonal skills in efficiently navigating e-learning platforms, design and development strategies focusing on flexibility, relevance, and adaptability (Aithal et al., 2024). Furthermore, it has been determined that supportive interactions with peers and supervisors have a crucial role in improving the motivation and involvement of inmates in educational endeavors to overcome inmates' frustration, e.g., first-time offenders' hopelessness, and denial (Mafilika & Marongwe, 2024).

Zhao, et al. (2020) discovered disparities in ideological underpinnings between Western and Chinese prison systems. Within Western penal systems, particularly in the United States, the prevailing correctional ideas seem to revolve around deterrence and retribution. The scholarly community has generally disregarded the attitude of jailed individuals in China, despite its significance as a crucial aspect of prison adaption. Limited knowledge exists regarding the elements that influence a jailed individual's attitude within Chinese jails and the mechanisms by which these factors operate. Without extensive empirical study, the personnel in Chinese prisons mostly depend on traditional knowledge about moral education and ideological instructions to help prisoners adjust their attitudes and beliefs.

However, obstacles including restricted internet access, illiteracy, and learning difficulties may pose a barrier to some incarcerated individuals when trying to communicate via written correspondence, while institutional barriers inside prison settings, and limited access to technology can impede inmates' ability to effectively communicate and study (Antojado & Ryan, 2024). A multifaceted approach is needed to address these issues, including policy reforms, investments in technology infrastructure, and training programs for staff members and prisoners (Kaur, 2024). Examining inmates' e-learning communication strategies highlights the significance of identifying and resolving the needs and difficulties that incarcerated learners face. Educational programs within correctional facilities can be crucial in encouraging rehabilitation, lowering recidivism, and supporting successful reintegration into society by utilizing digital resources and cultivating efficient contact with supervisors (Garth-James, 2022). In order to overcome the particular difficulties of the correctional setting, inmates use a variety of communication tactics when enrolled in online courses offered by universities. Current research sheds light on these tactics and how they may affect the educational experiences of prisoners.

In e-learning programs, information technologies, e.g., email contact serves as the main means of communication between university teachers and prisoners (Postu & Gheorgh, 2024). According to research, email provides a practical and easily accessible way for people who are incarcerated to get help with their schoolwork, turn in assignments, and get feedback from their teachers.

Furthermore, research by Sulistiani et al. (2024) found that distance education triggered the development of educational infrastructure and technology and highlighted the difficulties of telephone communication in settings for

correctional education. Telephonic communication allows for real-time conversations, clarification of course content, and emotional support for inmates participating in e-learning programs, despite restrictions such as call costs and restricted phone access. Furthermore, current research emphasizes how crucial it is to use technology-enabled platforms—like learning management systems (LMS) and video conferencing tools—to help inmates and universities communicate (Kwapisz et al., 2024). These systems improve inmates' participation and academic performance in online learning environments by providing opportunities for collaborative projects, virtual office hours, and interactive learning experiences. However, correctional officers understood the immense challenge isolation posed for incarcerated people, e.g., ineffective contact between inmates and universities can be caused by a variety of impediments, including restricted internet access, low technology literacy, and institutional regulations (Rosenberg et al., 2023).

To ensure that incarcerated learners have fair access to communication tools and resources, educational institutions, correctional agencies, and technology suppliers must work together to address these hurdles. To get over the obstacles of the prison setting, prisoners' e-learning contact tactics with universities use a combination of email, phone calls, and technology-enabled platforms. Promoting the academic performance and rehabilitation of incarcerated learners can be achieved by educators and policymakers through the implementation of focused interventions and a thorough grasp of the challenges of communication within correctional facilities.

The subject of prisoners who exhibit a strong desire to continue their education is becoming increasingly important in the field of correctional education. Given that education has a beneficial impact on post-release outcomes and recidivism rates, this motive draws attention to an important window of opportunity for diverse rehabilitation and reintegration into society (Mukasheva et al., 2024). The benefits of educational programs offered in correctional facilities as well as the elements influencing inmates' enthusiasm for education are discussed in recent literature. Tharshini et al.'s (2024) research examines the correctional system resocialisation activities that include training programmes such as vocational training, tailored-made education and professional development to enhance prisoner's social development skills.

What communication strategies do prisoners in Namibia utilize when interacting with their supervisors during e-learning sessions, and how do these strategies facilitate or hinder their part educational progress within the prison environment?

2. Methodology
2.1 Research Design
Qualitative research provides detailed descriptions and deeper insights into participants' experiences and was, therefore, used in the investigation. Data used in this study was derived from narrative interviews with student prisoners in a Namibian Correctional Facility. The correctional facility provided the researcher a private room to meet with the participants. Purposive sampling was used, and

the selected participants were chosen because they were student prisoners. Twelve student prison participants took part in the study. It was conducted through face-to-face interviews with people-in-prison, which was beneficial for them in terms of convenience, that is, in minimising the apparently inhumane conditions of prison transportation and personal trauma of associated strip-searching. Sampling criteria were that participants must be enrolled in a prison education program, be willing to participate in the study and must give written informed consent before interviewing.

3. Research Instruments

3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which lasted 30 minutes with each of the 12 participants. To ensure validity of the responses, the participants were asked to clarify and expand on their responses to ensure their viewpoints were accurately represented. The interviews were followed by a research questionnaire with the same questions. The results of the questionnaire are not included in this paper. Interview questions covered topics including how they communicated with their supervisors, what obstacles they faced, how they overcame them, and how they thought communication affected their academic path. To ensure accuracy and capture the subtleties of participants' responses, an audio recorder was used to record the conversations during the interviews.

3.2 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed word for word from the audio recordings, the next stage of data processing was to convert the transcripts into English. This translation facilitated a thorough analysis and comprehension of the data, irrespective of the language spoken during the interviews. An experienced translator, skilled in both the original language (perhaps a regional dialect or language used by the inmates) and the desired language (English), was assigned the responsibility of carrying out this translation procedure. Crucially, the translation was executed with utmost fidelity, preserving the authentic significance and subtleties of the participants' answers. After the transcripts were translated, the analysis was conducted thematically. This entailed discerning recurrent patterns, themes, and insights within the data that were relevant to the research questions and objectives. Themes were derived from the questions posed during the interviews, as well as the emerging patterns identified in the data. The thematic analysis facilitated a systematic examination of the communication tactics used by inmates when engaging with their supervisors in e-learning sessions.

During the analysis, the researcher used an interpretive paradigm to comprehend the transcribed data. The interpretive paradigm focuses on comprehending the subjective experiences and the meanings ascribed to phenomena within their social context. Consequently, the researcher analyzed the transcribed data using this perspective, aiming to provide profound understandings of the prisoners' communication tactics, motivations, difficulties, and encounters inside the jail setting. The researcher used thematic analysis within an interpretative paradigm to obtain detailed and sophisticated findings that accurately represent the

intricate communication dynamics of inmates in e-learning environments. This methodological approach enabled a thorough comprehension of the research topic, providing useful insights for the development of theories, the design of policies, and the implementation of practical interventions to promote inmates' educational pursuits and rehabilitation undertakings.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are based on the communication strategies used by inmates when interacting with their supervisors in e-learning environments within a Namibian prison.

Based on the interviews conducted, inmates within Namibian prisons used various communication strategies to communicate their supervisors in their e-learning sessions. The following were their methods of communications.

- Communication via-email (the internet and online studies).
- Telephonic communication.
- In-person appointments.

The question which was asked to the student prisoners was: "How do you communicate with your supervisor?" The responses were captured verbatim, and the participants' responses were reported anonymously using "I" or "we" because the study was done at a correctional facility and for security reasons.

4.1 Communication via email (internet and online)

Communication via the internet and online studiesThe discussion starts with the participants' verbatim statements (presented in italics) and is followed by the analysis.

> *"Okay. Supervisor here they are good, they just go and connect us, us here, when you want to talk to them, we just talk to the officers and then we talk to the supervisor at the institution through the phones or to the females".*

A crucial area of study in correctional education research is the examination of how inmates engage in communication with their university supervisors in the context of e-learning. Effective communication between inmates and supervisors is essential for promoting educational progress, fostering a supportive learning environment, and facilitating positive outcomes for incarcerated students. Contemporary literature provides valuable insights into the communication dynamics and techniques used by incarcerated individuals who engage in e-learning programs within correctional facilities. Digital communication technologies could enhance and inhibit the communication needs of vulnerable people-in-prison because of control by wardens (McKay & Macintosh, 2024). The results suggest that prisoners often use successful communication tactics, such as using concise and coherent written communication and actively engaging with educational materials, to overcome the challenges presented by limited face-to-face interaction and technological constraints.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Finlay (2024) found that the importance of interpersonal skills in prison cannot be overstated. These solutions enhance the

academic engagement and performance of inmates in e-learning contexts by offering ongoing help, feedback, and explanation of course material.

However, digital interventions could play a role in complementing the rehabilitative work of lecturers in prisons (Morris & Johns, 2024). To ensure equitable and unbiased access to communication tools and resources for incarcerated learners, it is imperative for educational institutions, correctional agencies, and technology suppliers to collaborate and overcome these challenges collectively. The strategies used by incarcerated individuals when communicating with their university supervisors in online learning mode play a vital role in promoting educational advancement and achieving excellent results within correctional facilities. By understanding the specific challenges and benefits of education under these circumstances, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to enhance communication effectiveness and enhance the academic performance of incarcerated students.

> *"Communication with the supervisor, we are allowed to communicate via e-mail, under the supervision of the officer is law, whatever your communicating is for education purpose only. So, and telephonically although we have a challenge response, you might find that when you ask to call your supervisor or lecturer there is no credit on the phone. From my pocket also to buy my own credit it is also challenging because I don't have any source of income, only depend on the family also, but we communicate via e-mail and telephonically in this side".*

The offered statement emphasizes the difficulties and limitations that incarcerated individuals encounter while trying to communicate with their university supervisors, specifically in terms of obtaining access to email and telephones for educational purposes. Contemporary literature provides valuable understanding of the intricacies of communication in correctional facilities and proposes methods to overcome obstacles to successful communication between inmates and supervisors in online learning environments.

The study conducted by Bowling et al. (2024) found that people who are incarcerated, have the opportunity to take part in prison education that could assist them address systemic exclusion from educational opportunities. Evidence suggests that communication obstacles frequently lead to academic assistance being delayed, deadlines being missed, and incarcerated learners experiencing dissatisfaction. In addition, the research conducted by Uche et al. (2024) found that it could be difficult for incarcerated persons to participate in education programmes offered in correctional facilities. These include offering subsidized phone credits, setting specific time windows for communication, and installing secure email systems. The purpose of these interventions is to improve the accessibility and dependability of communication channels for incarcerated individuals, with the goal of encouraging their educational involvement and achievement. Moreover, it found that to tackle systemic problems in prisons case-by-case management system produces unequal outcomes (Winter, 2023). Collaboration among educational institutions, advocacy organizations, and correctional agencies is crucial in advocating for the rights of incarcerated learners and ensuring fair access to educational support services. To effectively overcome

communication difficulties experienced by incarcerated inmates, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive approach that integrates technological advancements, legislative lobbying, and institutional backing. By acknowledging the specific difficulties of communication in correctional environments and implementing focused interventions, educators and policymakers can improve the educational experiences and results of inmates engaged in e-learning programs.

> *"We communicate with our supervisors through e-mail on our e-learning platforms. Sometimes it takes two to three days to get the response. We try to call them telephonically, it is also difficult to phone from here, but we use the e-learning platforms, and telephonic also. Also, through e-mail. Telephonically, e-mails, these are the modes that I used to communicate with them. I communicated most, I communicated with my supervisor telephonically and by e-mails. I do not have a supervisor- My fellow inmates and the lecturers. Through, the facility allowed us to contact our supervisor through e-mail, my supervisor replied and then they also assist us to make calls".*

The presented statements elucidate the communication techniques used by incarcerated individuals to engage with their superiors and colleagues in e-learning environments within correctional institutions. Contemporary literature explores the difficulties and approaches related to various methods of communication, providing essential understanding of the dynamics of educational assistance for inmates. The study conducted by Griggs (2024) suggests that in providing quality higher education in prison must be aligned with the values of dignity and self-worth of the person and social justice. The findings indicate that although email provides a handy and non-simultaneous method of communication, delays in response times can impede the prompt sharing of information and assistance for incarcerated learners.

In a study by Walker et al. (2024), it was found that participants' training needs were motivated by both social and personal goals, such as contacting family members and becoming more competent with digital technology in general. The function of telephone communication is an immediate enabler between inmates and supervisors. Although incarcerated individuals face obstacles such as restricted phone access and call limitations, telephonic communication offers them the chance to receive instant feedback, clarify course material, and receive emotional support while participating in e-learning programs. Moreover, contemporary literature emphasizes the use of professional discretion to soften hard systems in correctional education settings (Leon et al., 2024). Without direct oversight, fellow prisoners frequently act as informal mentors and partners, offering support with academic work, sharing materials, and providing encouragement to their fellow inmates. Ultimately, inmates use both email and telephone contact to interact with their supervisors and classmates in e-learning settings within correctional facilities. To improve the accessibility and effectiveness of educational support services for inmates, educators and policymakers should analyze the difficulties and advantages of these communication methods and create policies accordingly.

4.2 Telephonic Communication

The statement below highlights the communication strategies used by prisoners to interact with their teachers or supervisors in e-learning settings within correctional institutions.

> *"Telephonically through the e-mail we used to communicate. Normally we communicate via the internet, online studies this is how we are in communication with the lecturers. I went physically there with an appointment; she assists me and then sometimes she sends mail or text to my cell phone which is with my wife and then she will forward me the message. That is the way of communication to get access to the lecturer. NCS give us access I can go like in my situation, I went for a whole week, in the morning from 8 o'clock, 11 o'clock is my appointment then she discusses then she gives me work, then I will do the work at class and then in the afternoon, the next day I will be taken outside again, so that we can complete with what we are doing. We complete with what we are busy".*

The inmate mentioned email, the internet and face-to-face meetings arranged by means of cell phones. Contemporary literature provides valuable information about the difficulties and tactics related to these methods of communication, emphasizing the significance of adaptability and cooperation in assisting inmates' educational pursuits. The study conducted by Antojado and Ryan (2024) investigated the use of technologies and found that technology enhanced the ability of incarcerated people to maintain connections with their lecturers. The findings indicated that this combination strategy enabled incarcerated learners to engage in both immediate talks and asynchronous communication, effectively meeting their varied requirements and preferences.

4.3 In-Person Communication

Peplow and Phillips (2024) found that in-person communication requires that we should follow the key components of procedural justice theory which are voice, respect, neutrality, and trustworthy motives.

In addition, research conducted by Kajawo and Johnson (2023) found that incarceration must not hinder student prisoners' access to quality education. Although faced with logistical obstacles such as schedule limits and security protocols, face-to-face encounters provide inmates participating in e-learning programs with individualized support and hands-on learning experiences. Policymakers can improve communication and increase access to academic support services in prisons by forming collaborations between correctional agencies and educational institutions.

Ultimately, persons who are in prison use a mix of telephone, email, and face-to-face communication to engage with their instructors and get educational support services in online learning settings. By comprehending the intricacies of communication within correctional facilities and employing cooperative methods, educators and policymakers can foster the academic achievement and reformation of inmates**.**

5. Limitations

The study was done in one Namibian Correctional Facility which is a limitation. The number of participants was too small. The results obtained from a single correctional facility in Namibia may not be indicative of the entire population of correctional facilities in the country. Variations in management strategies, inmate demographics, or available resources among facilities could impact the study's relevance to different contexts. The incarcerated population in the correctional facility was limited in size and lack representation from different prison in Namibia, which might hinder the capacity to identify larger patterns or differences. This could also limit the research study's ability to thoroughly investigate the experiences of various prison students.

The investigation was also restricted by the limited resources and access to the chosen facility involved strict protocols. Conducting research at a prison had many ethical and practical obstacles. These challenges included the need to get informed consent, maintain confidentiality, and address possible dangers to both researcher and participants. These problems might add complexity to the study process and had an impact on the quality of the results.

6. Research Implications

Future research could explore the long-lasting impacts of communication strategies on e-learning and academic performance of prisoners, their successful reintegration into society, and their likelihood of relapsing into criminal conduct. Performing comparative analyses across multiple nations or regions could provide a more thorough understanding of the effectiveness of e-learning in penal institutions. Emphasizing the importance of digital literacy for jailed individuals and their supervisors can improve communication and promote learning outcomes. The study highlighted the need of reliable internet and technology resources in correctional facilities, which can encourage investments in technological infrastructure to support e-learning.

7. Policy Implications

Institutions and prison authorities should create and utilize Learning Management Systems platforms that are tailored to meet the special educational requirements of incarcerated learners. These solutions should prioritize ease of use and availability, considering the limited internet connectivity and probable technological limitations within correctional facilities. It is important to prioritize asynchronous learning to enable inmates to access educational materials at their own speed, taking into account their different schedules and potential disruptions in the prison setting. Prisons should allocate resources to acquire safe and dependable communication systems that would facilitate efficient interaction between convicts and their supervisors. Supervisors should get training programs to empower them with the necessary skills to properly communicate with and support jailed learners. Institutions should actively promote educational policies that endorse the integration of jailed inmates into higher education programs. Correctional authorities and institutions should cooperate to establish an environment that is favorable to learning for incarcerated pupils. Authorities

should allocate funds for the enhancement of technology infrastructure in correctional facilities to facilitate e-learning.

8. Conclusion

The question which was asked to student prisoners was: "How do you communicate with your supervisor?" The function of telephone communication is an immediate enabler between inmates and supervisors. Although incarcerated individuals face obstacles such as restricted phone access and call limitations, telephonic communication offered them a platform for communication. The use of both email and telephone contact to interact with their supervisors in e-learning settings within correctional facilities enabled students to communicate effectively.

In e-learning environments within correctional facilities, incarcerated individuals use diverse ways of communication to interact with their supervisors, lecturers, and fellow students. Supervisors generally communicate with inmates through email and telephone. However, inmates sometimes encounter difficulties such as restricted phone credits and delays in receiving responses. Effective communication can be achieved through various methods, each with its unique advantages. Email communication allows for detailed, documented exchanges that can be referred to later. Telephonic communication offers immediate interaction and is useful for urgent or complex discussions. In-person appointments provide the most direct and personal interaction, enabling understanding of non-verbal cues and fostering stronger relationships.

Communication via the internet and online studies encompasses video calls, chat platforms, and learning management systems, offering flexibility and accessibility for remote interactions and educational pursuits. Combining these methods could enhance overall communication with prison students in prisons. Email provides a handy and asynchronous method of communication, but at times there is a delay in response times, and this could impede the prompt sharing of information and assistance for incarcerated learners. Prison education should use e-learning platforms that stress security and privacy, ensuring that contact between inmates and supervisors remains confidential and adheres to prison standards. Platforms that incorporate end-to-end encryption and strong authentication procedures should be used to safeguard sensitive information shared during online interactions. It is necessary to establish organized lines of communication between inmates and supervisors to promote efficient engagement. Telephone communication is an immediate enabler between inmates and supervisors. Although incarcerated individuals face obstacles such as restricted phone access and call limitations, telephonic communication offered them a platform to communicate. The use of both email and telephone contact to interact with their supervisors in e-learning settings within correctional facilities enabled students to communicate effectively.

9. Recommendations

Exploring prisoners' communication strategies with their supervisors when studying in e-learning mode involves understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in a correctional facility. It is recommended that supervisors should

use a range of communication technologies, e.g., email, video conferencing, and encrypted messaging platforms, to cater for diverse needs and preferences of incarcerated students. It should be ensured that the selected platforms are easily usable and user-friendly for inmates, considering any technological or security limitations inside the prison environment. Incarcerated students should be provided with digital literacy training sessions to enhance their ability to proficiently use e-learning tools and communication platforms. There should be continuous technical assistance to resolve any problems that might occur with e-learning platforms, guaranteeing seamless and uninterrupted communication.

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