

Institutional Mechanisms and the Reintegration of Offenders in Nigeria

Samuel Chukwudi Agunyai^{1*} , Victor Ojakorotu², Gogo Eugene Gogo³

¹ Department of Political Studies and International Relations, North West University, SOUTH AFRICA, Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, NIGERIA, ORCID: 0000-0002-3338-8430

² Department of Political Studies and International Relations, North West University, SOUTH AFRICA, ORCID: 0000-0002-8705-804X

³ Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, NIGERIA

*Corresponding Author: agunyais@oauife.edu.ng

Citation: Agunyai, S. C., Ojakorotu, V. and Gogo, G. E. (2025). Institutional Mechanisms and the Reintegration of Offenders in Nigeria, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 1235-1252. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.1768>

Published: November 14, 2025

ABSTRACT

The study examined available institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria and determined if these mechanisms enhance the proper reintegration of offenders into society. These were the views on advancing knowledge about the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms in promoting the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. Data were gathered through Key Informant Interviews with 16 key informants who were drawn from 2 high-ranking correctional officers, 2 online distance learning correctional tutors, 2 members of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese, and 2 officers of CLEEN (Centre for Law Enforcement Education) foundation in Lagos and Abuja, respectively. Lagos and Abuja were selected because both host medium-level correctional institutions with high-profile convicted criminals. The choice of participants was based on their knowledge about the subject matter. Data were analysed using descriptive thematic analysis. The findings indicated that Inmates' Internship Programme (IIP), Online Distance Learning (ODL), sporting, vocational studies, guidance and counselling, ICT-coding, and economic empowerment programmes are among the available institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The findings also revealed that these mechanisms hardly have any positive impact on the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It concluded that the effectiveness of these institutional mechanisms is limited due to overcrowding, adversarial inmate-officer relations, and insufficient funding, poor nationwide orientation about the acceptance of offenders, as well as officer misconduct.

Keywords: Correctional Services, Offenders, Institution, Mechanisms, Re-integration

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019, which repealed the Prison Act Cap. P29, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, enacted the Nigerian Correctional Service to receive offenders (both convicted and not convicted ones), rehabilitate, and reintegrate offenders into society. This underpins the efficient operation of correctional institutions in Nigeria. Research keeps highlighting the role of correctional institutions in this regard (Agunyai et al, 2019; Ossai, 2022; Aba, 2022). Although, other security institutions are engaged in the maintenance of law and order, prosecution of criminals, and the country's general security management (Handbook on Dynamic Security and Prison Intelligence (2015), correctional service remain the foremost security institutions with mechanisms that connect offenders with society (Bakken & Visser, 2018), "the most symbolic formal social

reformation agents" (Berghuis, 2018) and "one of the biggest, most visible, and important [and] the gatekeeper of the criminal justice system" (Farrington, 2020; Agbakwuru et al., 2021), with normative expectations of duties to both the government and imprisoned inmates

To offenders, correctional service is expected to effectively utilize available mechanisms to rehabilitate and reintegrate them, using the effective management system provided by the government (Agan & Starr, 2018). Correctional service is a security organisation of the state specifically created by the Nigerian Correctional Service Act in 2019, to effectively engage in the correction of anti-social behaviour of, and reintegration of offenders (Adetula & Fatusin, 2010). The essence is to ensure that criminals are taken off the society and are corrected of their criminal behaviour, before releasing them into the society (Ismaila, 2020; Onyekachi, 2016).

From the perspective of correction, correctional institutions utilize available mechanisms to correct, reform, and make convicted offenders remorseful of their criminal action, and transform their habitual criminal behaviour to a more dignified, desired, and socially accepted one, which can effectively aid their reintegration into society. In carrying out these functions, there are some mechanisms put in place to facilitate the smooth reformation and reintegration of inmates into society. However, studies have indicated significant deficiencies in these institutional mechanisms for the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Okafor & Tukura, 2023).

The foregoing raises doubts about the utility and sustenance of correctional mechanisms such as inmate internship, apprenticeship, online distance learning, vocational studies, and digital acquisition skills in Nigeria's correctional institutions. Evidence shows that although most of the correctional institutions have vocational and digitalize training programmes, agricultural extensions, online distance learning programmes, specifically designed to reform and rehabilitate inmates, with the special purpose of changing their criminal behaviour to a more acceptable one both within the correctional institution and outside, yet, the inmates are hardly reformed or rehabilitated after spending time incarcerated (Araromi, 2015; Ogadinma et al, 2015). This may have made Obioha (2011) argue that inmates, including the convicted ones, are hardly rehabilitated due to poor funding of institutional mechanisms that would have facilitated comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society.

Nevertheless, distrust and non-acceptance remain pervasive of the duties of correctional institutions in Nigeria, as people hardly believe they have the capacity to effectively reform and reintegrate offenders into society. This distrust is partly caused by poor orientation of the public on the need to be supportive of offenders (Heney, 2022; Hannibal et al., 2019). Red tape and administrative delays are frequently caused by the jail system's too centralized structure, restricting initiatives for change that fill in gaps in ex-offenders' reintegration (Heney, 2022). Put differently, efforts to ensure a smooth and sufficient rehabilitation of formerly incarcerated individuals into society are not being reflected in the changing makeup of correctional institutions.

Mechanisms established to address the adequate reintegration of ex-inmates, such as conjugal visits, inmates' internship on community services to gradually familiarize the inmates with society, allowing long-serving inmates, who have almost completed their jail terms, to participate in farming and religious activities to bring them closer to society, have continued to be mostly ineffective (Hindus, 2017). The situation is the reason for the choice of this research, which tries to examine the extent to which institutional mechanisms have been instrumental to the reintegration of offenders into society in Nigeria. It is hoped that research in this direction will furnish an understanding of how most correctional facilities across Nigeria could tap into the findings of this study on how to achieve positive outcomes in the reintegration of offenders to society.

The main objective of this study is to assess the extent to which institutional mechanisms in correctional institutions have been instrumental to the successful reintegration of offenders into society. Specifically, the study focuses on how the possibilities that industrial attachments, family visitations, job internships, online distance learning, and vocational programmes could enhance efforts at vibrant and positive reintegration of offenders. The results have important theoretical and policy implications. Theoretically, it will expand debate on the extent of ex-offender–society relationships and reintegration, and how institutional mechanisms aid in improving positive reintegration outcomes. The outcomes of the findings also suggest means by which the control-general of correctional institutions can optimize these mechanisms to improve strategic efforts at improving the reintegration of offenders to society in Nigeria.

Mapping the problem in correctional institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of Offenders in Nigeria

It is expected that correctional institutions, while receiving inmates, deploy available mechanisms to rehabilitate and reintegrate these inmates into society (Ndukwe & Nwuzor, 2014). However, the reality in Nigeria with the reintegration of offenders showed that while correctional institutions suffer from either non-availability of these mechanisms or poor managerial capacity, offenders are hardly effectively integrated into society, as they face problems such as isolation, cold reception from members of society, among others (Ossai, 2022; Herbert et.al., 2015). Although efforts from successive Nigerian governments and non-governmental organizations have been

commendable, especially in terms of support and collaborations in ensuring the proper integration of offenders, evidence indicates huge lapses in the enforcement of these available mechanisms (Abiodun et al., 2021; Balsamo & Sisak, 2021; Onah, Adeniyi, & Eneh, 2019). These lapses raise serious concerns about the capacity of the Nigerian correctional service in the reintegration of offenders; they also question the extent to which correctional institutions have achieved their statutory goals. Reintegration of offenders is one of the goals of correctional institutions in Nigeria (Omale, 2013; Falayi & Ajaja, 2018; Musa, 2023). In achieving these goals, institutional mechanisms such as inmates' internship programmes, apprenticeships, online distance learning, sports, vocational studies, and others have been specifically designed to enhance the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Orakwe, 2011; Ariyo, 2023). While these mechanisms have garnered commendation and attention, they also raise doubts about their effective implementation and sustainability, considering the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria (Agunbiade, 2010; Omale, 2013; Daramola, 2023). This doubt further raises concern for a thorough appraisal of institutional mechanisms in correctional institutions in Nigeria, hence this study.

Research in this direction certainly would stimulate the design of policies to strengthen institutional mechanisms of correctional institutions towards adequate reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Ojo, 2021). Indeed, extensive research works have been conducted in the area of the reintegration of inmates; however, many of the findings of these studies have blamed the Nigerian government and the correctional institutions for inadequate reintegration of offenders. There is scarce research committed to examining how mechanisms specifically designed to re-integrate offenders failed despite their much popularity. Besides, research attention has been limited in examining how the Nigerian society is sabotaging the reintegration of formerly incarcerated people in Nigeria. Specifically, evidence is scant on how internships and industrial placement of inmates, based on their acquired vocational and online academic skills from incarceration, can enhance effective and smooth reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, hence the study. To bridge this gap, this research seeks answers to the following questions: What are the institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria? How have the mechanisms impacted the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria? The broad aim of this research is to determine how effective correctional institutional mechanisms are in the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional Mechanisms

In the context of this study, institutional mechanisms represent processes, strategies, and programmes available within the correctional institution for the proper functioning of, and that can facilitate the achievement of the goals of the correctional institution (Wiafe, 2021; Uyanga & Emman, 2016). Correctional institution, as institutions of security, has statutory goals, which include receiving inmates both convicted and awaiting trial, rehabilitating and reintegrating of inmates into society (Joseph et al., 2021; Khey, 2016; Byrne et al., 2019). The effective performance of these functions or goals largely depends on what is called mechanisms, which are tools, strategies, programmes, and initiatives adopted in the management of inmates (Khey, 2016). Institutional mechanisms are procedures that, in certain circumstances, connect stimuli and reactions (Chukwudi, 2012). They are made up of the procedures that give objects institutional or stimulus functions. Institutional mechanisms represent different programmes, strategies, and processes adopted or available within the correctional institution, but that are used to reform, rehabilitate, and reintegrate offenders into society. It can be transforming and originating (Headley & Garcia-Zamor, 2014). Transforming in the sense that it is made up of stimulus-response and linkages that cause correctional facilities to alter how they encourage inmates to engage in common activity. The process is one of re-investiture. This represents situations whereby correctional institutions that have stimulation qualities that have been in operation up to a certain time, but that now change their institutional character (Byrne et al., 2019). This type of institutional mechanism is transforming because correctional institutions can improve their old ways of rehabilitating and re-integrating inmates and changing these old ways into new strategies and processes of managing inmates (Joseph et al., 2021). As it has already been mentioned, this kind of institutional mechanism is more than just the creation of a novel stimulus attribute, but a process of replacing the old strategies of managing inmates with more recent and workable ones (NCS, 2021). Institutional mechanisms can also be modified for rehabilitation and reintegration purposes. A modified institutional mechanism is the process entailing a secondary fluctuation in the stimulus functions of the correctional institutions where they reside (Joseph et al., 2021). During the whole evolution of correctional facilities, accompanying changes in the conduct of offenders as a result of the adjustment may still be regarded as directly ongoing actions (Headley & Garcia-Zamor, 2014). This kind of mechanism is termed developmental. For instance, the modification from hard labour by offenders in correctional institutions to their attachments to farms, local industries (water, block, wood producing industries), in host communities, could be a means of improving the gradual reintegration of offenders into society (Otu, 2015). It could also be noted that the instrument of institutional growth works to alter the conditions under which ex-offenders are

housed in the correctional institution environment, enabling them to gradually relate or interact with members of society through attachments to owners of local industries (Jing, 2010; Joseph et al., 2021; Otu, 2015). The developmental type of institutional mechanism is related to the culturalization process (Otu, 2015). This is because correctional institutions can domesticate offenders within the host society or community around the correctional institution, and inmates, in turn, modify their behaviour over time as they are attached to local industries (Khey, 2016).

This process of institutional modification is essential to changing the mindset of ex-offenders, which is made possible by their interaction with the public (Otu, 2015; Jing, 2010). This would not have been possible without the modification of their confinement to activities or work within the correctional institution alone. With the initiative to introduce them to internship programmes and industrial attachments, there is the likelihood that members of society would be opened to receiving and accepting them without any problem (NCS, 2021). Given this mutually conditioning process, attaching offenders to local industries in a given community could continue over several generations as a clear behavioral stratification due to this mutually training process (Ndukwe & Nwuzor, 2014; Nwagboso, 2016). Therefore, a behavior level refers to a certain phase of the relationship that formerly incarcerated people have with society (Obioha, 2011; Marcus, 2015). Thus, while an ex-convict is being rehabilitated, one could anticipate that the ex-convict will alter in some ways, for the next set of persons who react to it. There is a horizontal temporal level in the rehabilitation process that influences subsequent horizontal levels (Ogadimma, et al., 2015; Onyekachi, 2016). In short, while an ex-convict is being reintegrated through internship and industrial attachments, such processes could influence the future reintegration of others in a definite way (Suyatno et al., 2017; Ugwuoke, 2015). Having reviewed institutional mechanisms, it is imperative to highlight and explain the different mechanisms available in correctional institutions in Nigeria. These include:

1. Rehabilitation – To help convicts develop new skills, attitudes, and behaviors that lower their likelihood of being rejected by the society, it is necessary to provide them with education, vocational training, and counseling (Ugwuoke, 2015).
2. Mental health treatment - One useful mechanism for proper re-integration is to address the underlying mental health conditions that fuel criminal conduct. With this mechanism, members of society would be assured of the mental stability of offenders, and this can enhance their acceptance (Agunbiade, 2010; Hopkins, 2015).
3. Support networks and visitations- Making supporting connections for offenders with friends, family, or neighborhood organizations can aid in their reintegration into society and lower their chance of relapsing (Adetula & Fatusin, 2010).
4. Community supervision - Officers on probation and parole can monitor and check in with offenders to make sure court orders are followed (Hopkins, 2015). They can also offer accountability and assistance to offenders (Hopkins, 2015)
5. Substance abuse treatment - Relapse can be avoided, and long-term rehabilitation can be supported by addressing substance addiction issues that are linked to criminal activity. Other mechanisms include
6. Restorative Justice Mechanism: This makes it possible for offenders to participate in programs for restorative justice, which help them accept responsibility for their actions, make apologies, and mend the damage their illegal activities have caused (Ugwuoke, 2015; Otu, 2015; Joseph et al., 2021).
7. Psychological intervention mechanism: With the help of this mechanism, offenders can receive psychiatric support for underlying mental health concerns, drug usage problems, and other personal struggles (Handbook on Dynamic Security and Correctional Institution Intelligence, 2015).
8. Education and vocational training mechanism: To acquire new skills and credentials that will facilitate their effective reintegration back into society, this mechanism facilitates ex-offenders' quick pursuit of education and vocational training while in a correctional institution (Ugwuokw, 2015). The purpose is to make offenders productive and useful to society after reintegration.
9. Electronic monitoring mechanism: This enhances the tracking of offenders and ensures they are adhering to their release terms using electronic surveillance. This is very useful during their industrial attachments to farms, blocks, and water industries; it can be used to track offenders to know their whereabouts (International Centre for Correctional Institution Studies, 2011).
10. Cognitive-behavioral therapy: Through therapy that addresses their illegal conduct and teaches them new coping mechanisms, this mechanism helps offenders avoid committing crimes in the future (Marcus, 2015).

Reintegration

This is the process by which condemned or convicted inmates return to the community to carry out their preferred lifestyle, which includes finding their desired job after being incarcerated (Ajala & Oguntuase, 2011). It also refers to an ex-offender's return to society to resume a normal life following their incarceration, including a family and meaningful career (Ajala, 2011). Reintegration, according to Davis and Ward (2012), is the process of

returning incarcerated individuals to society while attempting to discourage them from leading a lifestyle that is likely to result in crime. The term "process of individual ex-convict reconnection with the extant institutions in society" was defined by Denny (2016).

According to these definitions, reintegration is essentially the ex-offender's return to society, where they were regarded as integrated prior to their conviction and showed no interest in the matters that had led to their conviction. In agreement with Maguire (2014), Santhosh and Mathew (2021) contended that individuals convicted of crimes typically had low levels of education, few opportunities for employment, a history of drug and substance misuse, and inadequate financial assistance from their families before their conviction. This proved beyond dispute that people convicted of crimes are cut off from society before they are found guilty by an appropriate court. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that the government ought to provide for the reintegration of offenders.

Reintegrating ex-offenders into society is still thought to be a process, nevertheless (Bahr et al., 2012; Denny, 2016). According to Bahr et al. (2012) and Denny (2016), it has been observed that inmates are expected to go through the re-entry and re-integration processes. The process for reentering society after serving time in jail is known as the re-entry level (Denny, 2016). According to Bahr et al. (2012), the reintegration process is thought to be ongoing and lasts the entirety of the condemned person's life. According to Ajala and Oguntias (2011), successful reintegration of offenders involves obtaining training for a particular job during the correctional institution term, getting employment for offenders upon release from the correctional institution, and mending family relationships. According to Denny (2016), the community, family, peers, and each person's unique characteristics are important elements in an ex-convict's successful reintegration back into society. Several issues have been identified as potential barriers to the effective reintegration of people who have served time in a correctional institution into society. These include low self-esteem, peer pressure, inadequate family support, unemployment, and drug addiction opportunities (Gana, Saeed, & Halid, 2021). The process of reintegration has been categorized by Santhosh and Mathew (2021) primarily into the individual and the community. Therefore, even while the main goal of reintegration is to allow ex-inmates to operate in society, the degree of reintegration is thought to lower the likelihood of recidivism (Denny, 2016). Therefore, McNeil (2017) argued for a partnership between governmental and non-governmental organizations to guarantee effective integration. Nonetheless, this study's definition of reintegration follows the guidelines put forward by Bahr et al (2012).

According to Thurber (1998), reintegration of offenders refers to any initiatives and services aimed at assisting criminals in becoming law-abiding citizens before, during, and after their release. According to Zondi (2012), reintegration is a crucial process in which families, communities, and professionals assist formerly incarcerated individuals in regaining their footing and committing crimes. According to Davis et al. (2012), Healy & O'Donnell (2008), Muntingh (2005) and Shinkfield & Graffam (2009), reintegration is a long-term, complex process that we have not yet fully understood. Reintegration cannot and should never be viewed as an event. According to Pathayachee (2008), the premise that crime is a sign of a break in or absence from community forms the basis of reintegration theory. According to Zondi (2012), countries' criminal justice systems see it as their societal duty to assist convicted individuals in their rehabilitation and reintegration. The White Paper on Corrections, states that meaningful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders require the participation of multiple stakeholders and functional institutional mechanisms. Consequently, multi-stakeholder approaches are essential to reintegration efforts at the policy level. Organizations like the police, courts, communities, voluntary organizations, and municipalities are consequently considered as crucial to assisting offenders effectively reintegrate back into society. Although most of these institutions are offering essential services and utilizing different mechanisms in this area, there are still certain gaps and challenges in the way that they enforce these mechanisms (Zondi, 2012).

In the Nigerian case, the main criticism against correctional institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders is that these mechanisms don't really help criminals change. With a few notable exceptions, Agunyai and Ojokorotu (2024) contends that several attempts to rehabilitate convicted inmates have not produced appreciable outcomes. Recidivism soars as a result. This may have made Brown (2011) conclude that the majority of formerly incarcerated individuals revert to crime and find their way back into correctional institution within few years after release. The story seems the same, when Padayachee (2008) submits that between 80% and 94% of offenders who are released from correctional institution in South Africa are thought to commit crimes again. Because of this, many believed that available institutional mechanisms in Nigeria's correctional institutions are weak in delivering the proper reintegration of offenders. While several scholarly evidence has doubted the potency of these mechanisms for the proper reintegration of offenders, it is imperative to note that the rate of recidivism among offenders is not always caused by weak institutional mechanisms. Rather, societal pressure and the inability of offenders to cope with new challenges, they face in society often compelled them to revert to crime after being released from correctional institution (Brown, 2019).

In a bid to correct the narrative of always blaming institutional mechanisms for high rate of recidivism, Martinson (2001) advised that the inadequacies in the provision of offender reintegration programs must instead be addressed. According to Martinson (2001), despite the weakness of institutional mechanisms in the reintegration

of offenders, the continue utilization of these mechanisms should not be abandoned. It is very clear that the failure or weakness of correctional institutional mechanisms is not the only reason why the reintegration of offenders is not successful, but factors such as societal pressure is distorting the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. While the foregoing review has revealed implementation gap and inadequacies of institutional mechanisms, it was also discovered that genuine and effective tackling of these inadequacies would go a long way in enhancing the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It was revealed that the continual usage and adjustment of these mechanisms is far better and more productive than total abandonment of the strategies (mechanisms).

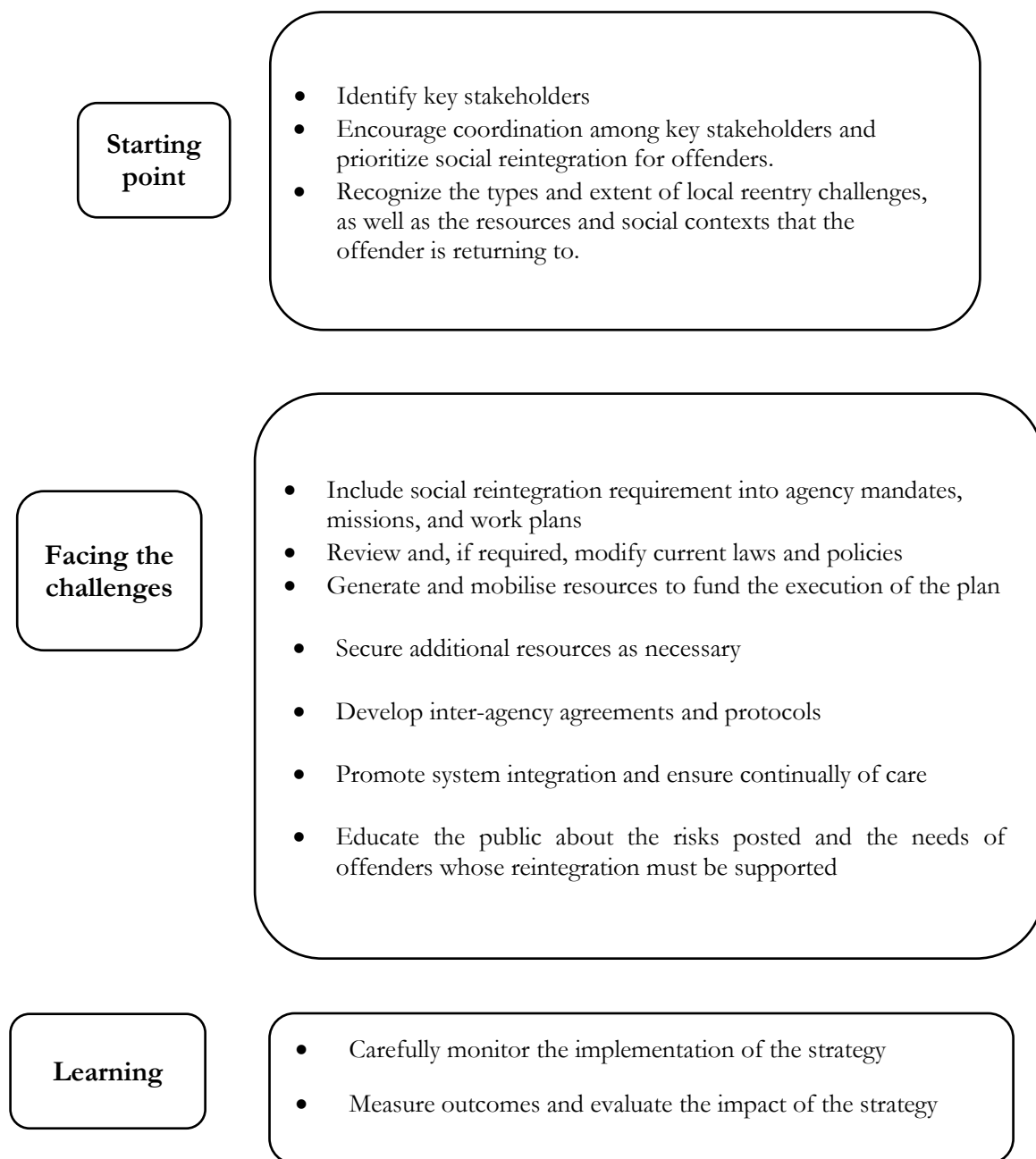


Figure 1: Elements of the Reintegration strategy of Offenders

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts structural-functionalism as a unit of analysis of the connection between institutional mechanisms and the reintegration of offenders. This theory aptly explains the reintegration of offenders. This is because it sees a correctional institution as a structure with specific functions that can be achieved using viable mechanisms. It argues that the success or positive outcomes of its functions largely depend on the capacity of the structure or institution to effectively carry out these functions (Gatotoh, 2011; Lee et al., 2014; Cook et al, 201).

Evidence shows that various factors can stimulate the positive and negative outcomes of correctional institutions (Aliyu et al., 2017; Alipoyo, 2022). In the context of this analysis, institutional mechanisms that are specifically put into place to enable correctional institutions to perform their functions are critical to the success or failure of the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. For instance, according to Agunyai et al (2017), for a correctional institution to effectively perform and achieve its goals, all its different components must effectively perform their functions to enhance the proper reintegration of offenders. Evidence shows that each of the component units of the correctional institution has specific mechanisms for carrying out its functions. In the context of Nigeria's correctional institutions, mechanisms such as vocational skills acquisition programmes, internship, counselling, mental therapy, online distance learning, and behaviour reformation programmes, religious outreach programmes, among others, have been useful for the reintegration of offenders. However, the extent to which correctional institutions in Nigeria have effectively utilized these mechanisms for the proper reintegration of offenders is largely doubtful, considering the rate of recidivism in the country.

This theory adequately explains the link between institutional mechanisms and the reintegration of offenders. The theory strongly holds the view that stability in the larger society depends on the effective performance of the specific functions of component units that make up the system. In the context of this study, safe, peaceful, and successful reintegration of offenders, which in the long run could reduce the rate of recidivism, largely depends on how correctional institutions in Nigeria's political system can effectively deploy available mechanisms for the proper rehabilitation of offenders. Their ability to effectively utilize the rehabilitative mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders is likely to go a long way in promoting the expected stability in society. The stability in this context refers to a reduction in crime or recidivism rate, and peaceful co-existence between released offenders and members of society (Cook et al., 2015). One of the assumptions of structural-functionalism is that a correctional institution is expected to perform its functions using workable and viable strategies or mechanisms (Miceli, 2009; Olufemi et al., 2010; Bennett, 2015). However, evidence indicates huge inadequacies in the process and strategy of the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Gatotoh, 2011; Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012). And these inadequacies have largely been responsible for the unsuccessful reintegration of offenders into society (Wolfgruber, 2010; Olufemi et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2015). It has also been blamed for the non-acceptance of inmates in society. Studies revealed that the majority of offenders after release still revert to crimes (Schmitt & Warner, 2011; Zondi, 2012). Their continued reversion to crime, which destabilizes society, is referred to as the dysfunctionality of correctional institutions in Nigeria. Corroborating this view, Obioha (2011) opines that the entire functional parts of correctional institutions are all broken down, thus contributing negatively to maintaining a society free from recidivism.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design using a qualitative method. The qualitative method is fundamental to this research as it enables expert opinion on the subject matter and the use of interviews with key informants who have an adequate understanding of the subject. The approach encourages People's perspectives and experiences to be explored in the study (Patton, 2003:7–14), which adds to a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2012:383-392; Patton, 2003:7–14). The research locations are Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria. The two former and current capitals are hosts to medium-level correctional institutions, with a high profile of convicted criminals. In each location, medium-level correctional services (Kirikiri and Kuje) were selected because they both share similar characteristics in terms of custodian management, and such a choice was also validated by the fact that data gathered from these facilities could give an accurate picture of the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria.

The population and sample size of the study include top-ranking officers (2) and online distance learning tutors in the Nigerian correctional service (2), members of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese (2), and officers of CLEEN (Centre for Law Enforcement Education) foundation (2), drawn from Lagos and Abuja, respectively. The inclusion criteria of participants include proof of being a correctional officer in Kirikiri and Kuje, and online distance learning correctional tutors in Kirikiri and Kuje, residents in Lagos and Abuja, but members of the Justice system, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese, and CLEEN. In addition, participants must be between 18 and 65 years. The exclusion criteria include participants not from Abuja or Lagos, and not correctional officers from Kirikiri and Kuje, below 18 years, and above 65 years, and participants with no knowledge of the reintegration of offenders. Key Informants Interviews with 16 purposively selected participants, with adequate knowledge of the subject matter, formed both the research instrument and sampling technique of the study. Data from secondary sources, such as books, journals, periodicals, reports, and parliamentary enactments, complemented the primary data. Data were analyzed using descriptive thematic content analysis. The analysis followed the three processes that Attride-Stirling (2001:390) outlined: data reduction, or dissecting the text; exploration of the text; and integration of the exploration.

Ethically, the study presents a low risk to participants by interviewing only the key informants who have adequate knowledge of the subject. First, the rights of participants in the study were clearly stated, as they have the absolute right to pull out of the study at any time. Before conducting the interviews, participants were informed that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary and they were free to answer the questions in any way they deemed appropriate. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout, as the identities of respondents were not exposed. Instead, pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. Participants were clearly informed that they have the right to either grant or refuse access to their information. As a result, participants' consent to participate in the study was legally sought and approved by each participant before the interview. The interview was conducted in a language that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to participants, and questions were asked in a fair and unbiased manner, without any judgment or censorship of the respondents' answers. Approval was granted by the authorities of Kirikiri and Kuje correctional services in Lagos and Abuja, respectively, after the explanation of the purpose of the study, which mainly centers on academic purposes.

Results: Institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria

The first objective of this study was to identify available institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. This objective aims to expand knowledge of the availability of mechanisms that can aid the successful re-entry of offenders into society. Recall that Nigeria, like many other African countries, has made significant improvements towards reforming prisons, which has led to the change from prison to correctional services. This includes the ratification and domestication of various international treaties and conventions, including rules 104, 105, 106, 107, and 108 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, which stipulate that member countries should deploy appropriate mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders. As a result, Nigeria passed into law the Nigerian Correctional Act, 2019, and also reformed the existing correctional institutions, which have remained the basis for managing correctional institutions across the country. All these efforts are geared towards strengthening the capacity of correctional institutions to effectively reintegrate offenders in Nigeria. This objective seeks to further dwell on the views of the participants in shedding light on the availability of institutional mechanisms and the extent to which these mechanisms have been effectively utilized to aid the proper reintegration of offenders into Nigerian society. The extent to which correctional institutions deploy specific mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders is significant for reform implementation and the success of the reform on the intended beneficiaries. This is because evidence has shown that correctional services lack the capacity to reintegrate offenders properly into society (Wiafe, 2021; Uyanga & Emman, 2016). In view of this objective, four dominant themes, including vocational skill learning mechanism, educational mechanism, industrial/job rotational mechanism, and guidance and counselling, emerged from the participants' responses and other related documents.

Vocational Skill Learning Mechanism

This remains a prominent theme that most of the participants attested to as one of the institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The study found that previous empirical studies, such as Ugwuoke (2016) and Wiafe (2021), as well as the United Nations document on the treatment of prisoners, have all revealed that engaging offenders in various skill acquisition programmes prepares them for society. Prominent among these programmes are shoe-making skill acquisition, ICT-coding skills acquisition, bread-making, fish-farming skills, fashion designing, barbing, graphics designing, among others. Participants, who are from the group of custodial officers and the Catholic church, attested to the availability of these mechanisms in various correctional institutions in Nigeria. Vocational skill acquisition is fundamental when it comes to mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, because it enables offenders to receive diverse training on different vocational jobs (ICT, shoe-making, barbing, tailoring, hair-dressing, carpentry, among others). This helps to add value to the lives of offenders while in custody and in society. Also, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners rules 96, 97, and 98 have all stipulated that correctional institutions should effectively engage offenders in useful vocational skills acquisition programmes to keep them actively employed for a normal working day in society.

This position resonates with the participants' responses in both interviews and reviews of documents. Participants acknowledged the usage of the vocational skill acquisition mechanism, specifically designed for the rehabilitation of inmates to enhance successful reintegration into society. Participants revealed that vocational work areas cover shoe-making, bread-making, fashion designing, ICT-coding systems, hair-dressing/barbing, brick-laying, software techs, and fish-farming skills, among others. This usage of vocational mechanism for the reintegration of offenders also coheres with the United Nations declaration on fair treatment of prisoners.' Participants acknowledged the availability of this mechanism in most correctional institutions in Nigeria. One of

the participants among the senior officers of custodial services in Nigeria affirmed that most correctional institutions engage inmates in one vocational skills acquisition training or the other (P₇).

Corroborating the above is one of the senior officers' responses at Kuje Correctional Services, Abuja, who revealed that inmates in their custody have access to any vocational skills acquisition programme of their choice. To capture institutional mechanisms for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria, a participant, who is a senior staff member of Kirikiri Correctional Service in Lagos, revealed that:

In this institution, there are various vocational activities specifically designed to reform or rehabilitate inmates so that when they leave, they can have something to do with their hands in terms of skills they have acquired from here. Our vocational programmes are mechanisms specifically set up to rehabilitate inmates from their criminal attitude into a more improved or reformed one. These vocational skills acquisition programmes include fashion designing, ICT-coding, hair-dressing, brick-laying, among others. These vocational activities are available in most correctional institutions in Nigeria. The vocational skills acquisition programme has remained one of the viable mechanisms utilized for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria (P₄).

Implicit in the above statement is the fact that vocational skill acquisition is an established mechanism for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. The engagement of inmates, especially the convicted ones in practicable meaningful vocational studies, certainly would groom and reform the character of criminal inmates. It could make them feel remorseful and know the importance of work (P₁₃). It is a fact that correctional institutions have been committed to the use of vocational studies or learning to reform inmates. This effort has helped in the proper re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. For instance, one of the participants from CLEEN attested to a series of vocational skills acquisition programmes embarked upon by various correctional institutions in Nigeria to aid the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The participant notes that:

So, because of our criticism of the government's management of correctional institutions in the country, I know there were vocational skills acquisition studies or programmes available in many of the correctional institutions. So, for example, I am aware of ICT-coding programmes, shoe-making, and hair-dressing, among other vocational studies across correctional facilities. In fact, in Kuje, there are soap, cream, and specialized food-making acquisition programmes (P₇).

In another interview with one of the cluster groups in Lagos, the participant corroborated the P₇ statement above concerning available institutional mechanisms for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria, saying that Kirikiri Correctional Service has numerous vocational programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society. *We call the Kirikiri Correctional Service, the hub of vocational programmes in Nigeria (P₉)*. There is no inmates in Kirikiri Correctional Service, that is not engaged in one vocational skills acquisition programme or the other (P₉). To triangulate findings from interviews and reviews of documents with those of focus group discussion, the study identified some contrary opinions among participants who took part in the focus group discussions in both locations. The participants, who are mainly inmates lamented over poor implementation of these vocational programmes. Some revealed the non-availability of these programmes.. The participants revealed that only influential inmates have access to these vocational programmes, leaving many others idle. One of the participants in the focus group discussion held among clusters of inmates in Kirikiri and Kuje Correctional Services revealed that *'although mechanisms like vocational skills acquisition programme exist, only a few are engaged (P₁₄)*. This, by implication, negates fair treatment of inmates as stipulated by the United Nations. While it is true that vocational skills acquisition, as found in this study, is one of the institutional mechanisms specifically designed for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, there are noticeable flaws associated with this mechanism in some correctional institutions in Nigeria.

Educational Mechanism

Another notable mechanism available in custodial centres is an online distance learning system for inmates. As inmates serve their jail term, most correctional institutions collaborate with educational institutions or organizations such as National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to meaningfully engage inmates in different course of study through an online learning system (Araromi, 2015; Opafunso & Adepoju, 2016; Oroleye, 2018; Odutola & Alegbeleye, 2019; Fasae & Folorunso, 2020; Ike et al., 2023). Correctional institutions partner educational institutions in the development of educational curriculum that cover precarious cases of inmates, some

of whom are students before, but they got imprisoned. It is a means of rehabilitating inmates, especially the convicted ones, for reintegration into society (Okafor & Tukura, 2023). Participants from correctional institutions confirmed the use of educational training and development as one of the available mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders. This is in line with rules 104, 105, 106, and 107 of the United Nations Article on the treatment of prisoners. Regardless of the strategic action taken to domesticate the declaration, correctional institutions are conscious of the importance of engaging inmates to earn a degree while in custody. Participants across different stakeholders attested to the use of educational strategy for the re-integration of offenders. A retired senior correctional service officer buttressed the extent of the use of educational mechanism by correctional institutions in Nigeria. This participant noted that on several occasions, especially when inmates are idle, the management of correctional institutions offer advice to inmates to enrol in one course of study or the other. In his statement:

It is a common thing that in most of Nigeria's correctional institutions, there are educational activities going on. Inmates are advised to enroll in available courses offered online by NOUN. This has remained as a viable and fruitful mechanism that has been widely used for the reintegration of offenders. As inmates are enrolled in any course of study of their choice, they are likely preparing themselves for proper reintegration. This is because knowledge garnered by inmates, while in custody can be very useful, in society. The strategy of partnering NOUN, in terms of the online learning, is a viable and good mechanism for the reintegration of offenders (P₃₁).

Many other participants also confirmed the use of educational mechanism for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. Evidence revealed that there were a lot of educational programmes, and inmates were given an opportunity to apply and receive lectures online. Different clusters of participants, including inmates and convicted ones, gave their own experiences and what they felt management of correctional institutions should do to improve the quality of education in correctional institutions. It is interesting to note that participants acknowledged the fact that online distance learning, partnership with NOUN, tutorial classes and lectures are part of the educational mechanism available in Nigeria's correctional institutions (P₃).

Industrial Placement/Rotational job placement mechanism

Most of the participants, particularly officers from correctional institutions, acknowledged the fact that inmates, especially the convicted ones, who are almost rounding-up their jail term, are rotated from one job to the other, in order to acclimatize them with life outside the custody. Some of the jobs, according to one participant, where inmates are placed include farms, block and wood industries, sachet water making firms, and host of others around correctional institutions. The participants further note that this mechanism has been helpful in assisting inmates to gradually relate and interact with members of the society. For instance, a participant from CLEEN revealed that:

The placement of convicted inmates, who are almost concluding their jail term is another mechanism for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. This is necessary because of the way offenders are discriminated against after release. It is done with the goal to make inmates familiarize themselves gradually with members of society. Strategically, most correctional institutions deploy rotational job placement mechanism to prepare inmates for a life outside the custody. As we know that in Nigeria, offenders are not loved or accepted by members of society. To address this problem and enhance proper reintegration, most correctional institutions now make use of industrial attachment mechanism to prepare inmates for life after their confinement (P₆).

Apart from industrial attachments that can equip inmates with knowledge to relate with people in the larger society, participants collectively affirmed that industrial attachment of inmates to various vocational jobs is a critical institutional mechanism for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. This may have been responsible for why many correctional institutions, under tight security, occasionally allow inmates, who are almost completing their jail term to work on people farms, poultry, and local block and bread-making industries for familiarization (P₆). This was corroborated by P₁₄, who revealed that:

Industrial attachment of inmates, especially the convicted ones, who have almost ended their term in the custody, is good for both the society and the affected convicts. This is because, as they occasionally allow inmates to mingle and relate with members of society, they are preparing them for the life after custody. The society on the other hand, would learn how to accept and tolerate them. So, this mechanism is one of the strategies of preparing inmates for proper reintegration into society.

It is clear from the above submission, that the placement of inmates on job, in form of industrial attachment is one of the institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It is done to ensure that on one hand, the acceptance and tolerance of offenders after release and on the other hand, to provide offenders with the requisite job skill and knowledge to effectively compete with other members of society for job opportunities after release. The practical exposure of inmates to put into practice skills acquired through vocational skill learning, is critical to proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria.

Guidance and Counseling Mechanism

The theme 'guidance and counselling represent an important institutional mechanism usually available in most of correctional institutions across the country. This mechanism is a strategy that offers mental rehabilitation services to inmates. Its goal is to effectively and compassionately redress inherent criminal behavior in some inmates. It involves the use of experts, known as psychologists to give concrete advice, guide, and directive to inmates. To adequately address this, most correctional institutions employ clinical psychologists to look after inmates' mental illness. The role of guidance and counseling includes convincing inmates from their depressive state of mind to a more pleasant and rational state of mind. Evidence from participants and other reviewed documents revealed that some inmates fall into depression as soon they get into custody. For these participants, it has remained the reason why some inmates tried to kill themselves. But with timely intervention of clinical psychologists, who offer guidance and counseling services, many lives have been saved across correctional institutions in the country.

Almost all participants, especially those from religious organizations and civil society organizations confirmed that the availability of guidance and counselling of inmates as an institutional mechanism for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It is a fact that in most correctional institutions located in urban centres, offer guidance and counselling services to inmates. This according to P₁₀, may be partly because of the proximity of these correctional institutions to where clinical psychologists can be easily recruited.

To achieve this objective, hybrid coding strategies were employed, which comprised data and research-driven methods. This strategy is consistent with Boyaltix's (1998) coding strategies suitable for thematic analysis. On this note, participants were coded with codes P₁, P₂, and P₃, although to P₄₀. These codes represent each of the participants and their responses. On the first objective, which examined institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, this interrogation becomes very important in the face of numerous cases of how released offenders revert to crimes in society. This raises concern for the proper investigation of available mechanisms that can aid the proper re-entry of offenders into society. To achieve this objective, participants were asked questions relating to the availability of viable mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. Although almost all the participants agreed that the re-integration of offenders largely depends on institutional mechanisms available in correctional institutions, their responses differ on the availability of institutional mechanisms in Nigeria's correctional services. For some participants, most of Nigeria's correctional institutions lack the proper mechanisms required for the reintegration of offenders into society. In response to whether Nigeria's correctional service has viable mechanisms, capable of the re-integration of offenders, P₁ identified that:

Here at Kirikiri Correctional Service, mechanisms such as inmate internship programs, online distance learning, vocational studies, guidance and counseling units, psychological clinics, sports, and medical treatment, among others, are some of the mechanisms usually deployed for the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. Each of these mechanisms has a way of rehabilitating and reforming inmates to be useful to themselves and society.

In the same vein, P₂ believes that:

The Kuje Correctional Service has different mechanisms put into place for the reintegration of offenders. Some of the ones available here are vocational skill development, mental health support, and educational opportunities such as online distance learning. These mechanisms help in the reformation of inmates' criminal attitudes and go a long way in preparing them for society. With the development of skills training activities or ventures and various entrepreneurship activities in this prison, convicted inmates can be effectively reformed and be useful to society.

It is clear from the two participants above that Nigeria's correctional institutions have mechanisms, capable of re-integrating offenders into society. This raises concerns about the utility and sustenance of these mechanisms. Given

the fact that correctional institutions in Nigeria have mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders, why does the country still suffer from incessant cases of offenders reverting to crimes? Given this, almost all the participants, if not all, identified inadequate usage of available mechanisms as the main cause of recidivism in Nigeria. The response of P₃ regarding the increase in the involvement of offenders in crimes after society release was particularly more revealing. He reported that:

As a senior correctional officer who has worked in many of the correctional services across the country, I can categorically state that these correctional institutions have mechanisms ranging from educational (online and physical learning process), vocational (skills acquisition studies/training, medical (clinical treatment of inmates to be physically fit, healthy, and acceptable), psychological (mental checks and development), social (apprenticeship, internship, and rotational industrial/agricultural placements), and environmental (waste/refuse disposal conversion training,), among others, that are readily available for the reintegration of offenders in the country. However, the reality of many of these custodial institutions is that these mechanisms are poorly utilized, partly due to poor funding or a shortage of skilled officers.

From the above response it is obvious that the problem with the re-entry of offenders into society is poor implementation of rehabilitation programmes that could have helped in the reforming of offenders, while they are in custody. In the real sense of it, mechanisms with which to reform offenders in order to make them acceptable after release are available, but the enforcement of these mechanisms is where the problem is, in the Nigerian context. This may have made many of the participants, especially officers across correctional centres to opined that it would be out of place to say that correctional centres in the country lack institutional mechanisms for the re-integration of offenders into society. Although, few of the participants took an opposing view by saying that correctional institutions lack institutional mechanisms for the re-entry of offenders into society. Evidences abound to validate these opinions in the literature. For example, challenges such as overcrowding, dilapidated or old infrastructures, shortage of basic essential services in custodial centres, among others, have made scholars concluded that correctional institutions lack the capacity for proper re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. This is may have made P₄, P₅, and P₇ agreed that correctional institutions in the country lack the capacity in terms of personnel, resources, and mechanisms, to prepare offenders for proper re-integration into society. For P₄, he opined that:

Challenges in many of the correctional services have rendered institutional mechanisms inoperative for the re-integration of offenders. As a Catholic Priests with the mandate of humanitarian services and care for inmates, we visit correctional centres, and it is clear that some of our correctional centres have mechanisms in forms of programmes specifically designed to rehabilitate or reform inmates, including offenders. These programmes are expected to prepare offenders for re-entry into society. I have been to Kuje correctional centre for so many times, and I know that inmates are made to go through vocational skill acquisition classes or training, mental checks and therapies, online distance learning, agricultural internship programme, among others, to groom them for the larger society, after release.

The above view is similar to that of P₈, who revealed that:

As a custodial instructor, or what you can call a tutor in correctional centres, one of the viable mechanisms available in most of the correctional institutions across the country is the online distance learning system, where inmates receive lectures or attend classes online. This is preparing them for society, to be useful and employable after release. This is one mechanism that is commonly available in most of the correctional institutions in Nigeria. It is an educational mechanism purposefully designed to educate inmates while they are in custody, serving their jail term. It is a fact that most NGOs and religious organisations like Catholics, Winners Chapel, Deeper Life Bible Church, Redeem Christian Church of God, and many others, collaborate with the government to offer educational services to inmates. All of these efforts aid the re-entry of offenders into society.

The above views have been validated by findings in previous extant studies that indicated that some offenders, after release, already have the requisite educational qualifications to seek job opportunities while in custody (Okafor & Tukura, 2023; Odutola & Alegbeleye, 2019; Fasae & Folorunso, 2020; Ike et al., 2023). This may have been possible due to a well-organized and effectively managed online distance learning in correctional

institutions in Nigeria. The case in point is the partnership between correctional institutions and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Through this partnership or collaboration, inmates are allowed to apply for their choice of course of study and receive lectures online while they serve their jail term. Indeed, many incarcerated persons have earned a degree while in custody. For these categories of offenders, it is more likely they would revert to crimes after release, because they already have knowledge and skills that can make them compete for job opportunities in society. The view of P₁₀ was highly informative and revealing, as he opined that:

There is a high tendency to paint the picture that correctional institutions in the country lack mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders. Although some custodial centres do not have these mechanisms or suffer from a shortage of these mechanisms, it is misleading to blanketly say that there are no institutional mechanisms for the re-entry of offenders into society. It would be more appropriate to say that these mechanisms are scarce and therefore, it is limiting the capacity of correctional institutions to re-integrate offenders. The main problem lies with the proper usage of these mechanisms. They are available, but the enforcement or the delivery is faulty. This accounts for why, inmates, especially offenders remained hardened and still continue with crimes after release. This is because, in spite of the few availabilities of institutional mechanisms in some correctional institutions, offenders, are hardly reformed or prepared for the new life in society after release.

The evidence above shows that while the availability of institutional mechanisms across correctional institutions may not be the same as some may not have or have shortage of mechanisms for the re-integration of offenders, it very clear that in both circumstances, there are evidences of mechanisms like vocational skill acquisition, educational online teaching and learning, internship programme, industrial attachments, psychological/mental therapies, among others, utilized for the re-integration of offenders. Similarly, in a different, but more encompassing manner, P₉ argued that:

Correctional institutions in the country are dens for the hardening of inmates, including offenders. They are hardened because they are not engaged in any meaningful rehabilitation programmes that can prepare them for a life and living outside custodial cells. This is not to say that there are no vocational training, educational classes, guidance and counselling, and other practicable mechanisms, but the problem lies in the shortage of these mechanisms, partly due to overcrowding or a shortage of committed and skilled officers to enforce the usage of these mechanisms. This partly accounts for the reason why most offenders revert to crime after release from custodial centres. It is also the reason why the majority of Nigerians are not accepting or discriminating against offenders. It is generally believed that offenders are hardly reformed or totally rehabilitated while in custody in Nigeria.

For P₁₁, he indicated that:

“Since the goals of correctional institutions includes receiving of inmates-both the convicted and awaiting trials, rehabilitation, and re-integration of them into society, it is clear that Nigerian correctional institutions put into place mechanisms such as attaching or assigning convicted inmates (especially those almost completing their term) to agricultural, local wood industries, block-making industries, farms to work as labourers and familiarize with the outside world before final release. This familiarization programme is highly helpful in enhancing the acceptance of offenders in society after release. It prepares both the offenders and the citizens in society on how to operate and relate with each other after final release. Although this looks like a big risk, it is needed for the acceptability of offenders; not all correctional institutions in Nigeria have the capacity for the familiarization mechanism.

From the analysis of the first objective, evidence from the participants and extant studies align. Findings from the two sources (participants and extant empirical studies) revealed that mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders are available in correctional institutions in Nigeria (see P₁, P₂, P₃, Abba, 2022; Ezobi, 2022; Ossai, 2022). Although the availability in terms of quantity and quality, operation or usage, and application may differ, as some correctional institutions lack workable mechanisms and capacity to operate these mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. For instance, the majority of correctional institutions in rural areas lack institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Falayi & Ajaja, 2018; Ariyo, 2023; Daramola, 2023; Musa, 2023).

The Impact of Institutional Mechanisms on the Reintegration of Offenders in Nigeria

The theme above represents the second objective of this study, which examined the impact of institutional mechanisms on the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. This achievement of this objective becomes important since the reintegration of offenders is a critical function of correctional institutions. To achieve this objective, issues such as indicators of proper integration of offenders is likely to come up. Thus, it is imperative to highlight indicators of proper reintegration of offenders. By indicators, it means appreciable behavioral standards required of both the offenders and members of society after reintegration. That is, with proper functional institutional mechanisms, it is expected that offenders are remorseful, reformed (changed or improved positively in terms of conduct), acceptable, competitive in terms of acquisitions of requisite job skills, and economically-active, as well as contributions to Nigeria's socio-economic stability and development.⁷ It specifically means that all things being equal, the right and proper institutional mechanisms, are expected to change or reform offenders and make them meaningful not only to themselves, but the entire country. The extent to which institutional mechanisms have impacted proper re-integration remained largely unclear, as Nigeria currently battle high rate of recidivism. Institutional mechanisms are part of rehabilitation function of correctional institutions that have hardly yielded any positive outcomes. Evidences showed that in the Nigerian context, institutional mechanisms designed to rehabilitate inmates, for proper re-integration are lacking and, in some cases, where they are available, the implementation has been highly faulty (Awopetu, 2014; Ugwuoke & Ojonugwa, 2014).

This may have made Ugwuoke (2014) to conclude that since institutional mechanisms in Nigeria's correctional institutions are either non-existence, poorly enforced, or inadequate, critical indicators such as remorsefulness, changed behavior, offenders' acceptability by society, sense of belonging, and the spirit of nation-building would be difficult to achieve. This can be interpreted to mean that institutional mechanisms hardly have any meaningful impact on the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with what was found by Tanimu (2020), where it was revealed that despite the availability of institutional mechanisms in some correctional institutions, it is hardly possible to find proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. This finding could be validated considering the incessant cases of re-arrested offenders, who openly confessed that they revert to crimes after their release, partly due to their inability to secure a job, non-acceptability in society, discrimination, and their hardened behavior. Indeed, on several occasions, offenders have been caught continuing with crimes, partly as a result of ugly experiences faced while they are in custody. This, to a very large extent, signifies a weak impact of institutional mechanisms on the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The findings in extant empirical studies adequately align with those obtained during interview sessions. In fact, almost all respondents, except a few custodial officers, were of the view that institutional mechanisms in most of the correctional institutions are not enough to promote proper reintegration of offenders. Just like many of the scholarly views, participants during the interview sessions, especially P₁₂, P₂₀, P₁₃, P₄, and P₈, collectively affirmed that institutional mechanisms are rather used for the hardening of inmates than for rehabilitating them for proper reintegration. The revelations from P₇ and P₃₈ in one of the interview sessions were more informative about the level of custodial failure in Nigeria. For P₁₅:

I am an officer in charge of some of the rehabilitation mechanisms, especially vocational training, sporting, and internship programmes. These are good mechanisms on paper, but in reality, their enforcement is very weak due to inherent problems associated with the administration of correctional institutions in Nigeria. Problems such as overcrowding, poor funding, and economic hardship, which have whittled down staff commitment, have all eroded the positive impacts that institutional mechanisms would have had on the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It is very difficult to ascertain or determine the impact of these mechanisms on the reintegration of offenders because of the recurrent cases of how offenders revert to crime in Nigeria. This is because our institutional mechanisms are not working as expected; otherwise, offenders would have remained changed or reformed and accepted by society.

This is the same with the view of P₃₈, as it was established that:

With the recurrent cases of recidivism, it would be very difficult to agree that institutional mechanisms in Nigeria's correctional institutions have any fruitful impacts on the reintegration of offenders. This is because all the indicators of proper reintegration are hardly achieved or seen with the way custodial institutions are releasing hardened criminals into society in Nigeria. First, offenders, rather than show remorse and repentance, continue with crimes. Secondly, members of society, instead of showing love, stigmatize offenders. Thirdly, offenders' vocational skills and expertise can hardly align with any job opportunities in society. Fourthly, offenders hardly have any meaningful socio-economic contributions after release into society.

It you notice, all four indicators of proper reintegration are hardly seen in Nigeria, after the release of offenders.

It is clear from the above results or findings that available mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria are not enough or have a weak impact on the reintegration of offenders. The failure of these mechanisms to deliver proper reintegration of offenders has been attributed to several factors such as overcrowding, poor funding, and ill-equipped personnel to facilitate the reintegration, among others. This is consistent with the conclusion reached by Asokhia and Agbonluae (2013), which established that:

Convicted criminals are imprisoned for rehabilitation, which in turn aids the reintegration of offenders. In most cases, the providers of rehabilitation services are either ill-equipped or not at all to give wholesome services that can affect inmates' lives positively. Rehabilitation services are notable for their pivotal role in changing lives of the inmates; unfortunately, these are both not there or grossly inadequate.

Contrary to the above views, few participants were of view that institutional mechanisms have some sort of effect or impact on the re-integration of offenders. They base their arguments on the fact, that despite the level of weakness of these mechanisms, there are still some offenders whose lives have been positively changed and reformed. P₃₁, P₃₄, P₁₉, P₂₂, and P₄₀ among the entire participants express the view that institutional mechanisms have fairly impacted on the re-integration of offenders in Nigeria.

However, using critical check and balance, it is obvious that only five (5) of the sixteen (16) participants agreed that institutional mechanisms have positive impacts on the reintegration of offenders. This goes to show that these institutional mechanisms have not been faring well, in terms of the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. All the indicators (societal acceptability, changed character, low recidivism, low stigmatization, sense of belonging, among others) of proper reintegration are hardly seen after the release of offenders. Evidence showed that institutional mechanisms in the Nigerian context are not enough to influence or promote proper reintegration of offenders, as the country continues to suffer from recidivism orchestrated by offenders. To this end, it can categorically be interpreted those institutional mechanisms in Nigeria's correctional institutions have a weak impact on the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings and Validation of Assumptions

By the first specific objective earlier stated, the study found that there are several institutional mechanisms in the Nigerian Correctional Service. This study identified vocational skill learning mechanisms, educational mechanisms, internship mechanisms, guidance and counselling, and spiritual mechanisms as available institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The availability of these mechanisms underscores the importance of reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Lang et al. 2017; Omale, 2013; Falayi & Ajaja, 2018; Abiodun et al., 2021). Findings from this study, on the one hand, are consistent with the United Nations declaration on the treatment of inmates, which includes establishing mechanisms or strategies that cover educational empowerment, specialized skill acquisition, internships, mental development, guidance, and counselling. The study further revealed that these mechanisms not only aid rehabilitation but also the reintegration of offenders into society (Abiodun et al., 2021; Balsamo & Sisak, 2021; Onah, Adeniyi, & Eneh, 2019). It also aligns with the recommendations of various regional resolutions and parliamentary Acts, including the AU Correctional Institutions Protocol, and the Nigerian Correctional Act, 2019, which oblige correctional institutions in different countries to ensure proper treatment of inmates, regarding respect for their fundamental human rights and availability of institutional mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders. Findings also support the general notion of rehabilitation and reintegration as critical goals of correctional institutions in Nigeria.

Beyond the narratives of the availability of these mechanisms in correctional institutions in Nigeria, which align with the recommendations of many international organizations for the reintegration of offenders, this study found, however, that these mechanisms hardly exist in some correctional institutions, leaving many inmates in the affected custodial centres poorly rehabilitated and reintegrated. It is important to note that correctional institutions are not homogeneous, as different clusters exist, and they are also strata of rural versus urban centers. The intersection of rural-urban dichotomies of correctional institutions has implications for the availability of mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. Another argument is that, while rural correctional institutions generally suffer from a limited or total absence of viable mechanisms, the predominant number of custodial facilities in most urban areas can boast of quite a number of mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders. The rationale behind this classification is clearly based on the fact that government presence is felt more in urban centres than in rural areas. In fact, the proximity of correctional institutions to the centre of government sometimes determines the kind of assistance and provisions they receive from the government, unlike custodial institutions in rural areas, where facilities tend to be lacking. Addressing their peculiar challenges requires policy

intervention or a reform process. The reform processes, even though they originated with ensuring adequate facilities and mechanisms that can aid effective and proper rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, did not reflect the goal of the proper reintegration of offenders, which questions the genuineness and impact of the reforms on both the inmates and correctional institutions in Nigeria. Findings in this direction corroborate previous studies, which found that despite the availability of institutional mechanisms in some custodial institutions, they hardly enhance the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria (Ogadimma, et al., 2015; Onyekachi, 2016). The study found that indeed, there are institutional mechanisms specifically designed for both the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates into society. The objective was actually achieved, as the findings in this perspective clearly identified inmate internship programme, online distance learning, guidance and counselling, vocational skill acquisition, and spiritual tutelage as available mechanisms for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The achievement of this objective does not in any way mean that these mechanisms aid the proper reintegration of offenders, as critical indicators (changed behaviour, acceptability, low recidivism, among others) of a proper integration are lacking.

About the second research objective, the study found that the availability of institutional mechanisms hardly impacts or aids the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. Expectedly, with adequate implementation of these mechanisms, offenders are supposed to be reformed and changed from their anti-social behaviour to a more acceptable one, hence, the reduction in recidivism. The level of their acceptance in society is expected to be higher, and discrimination and stigmatization are also expected to be reduced, but the reality, as this study has indicated showed that these mechanisms rather than aiding proper reintegration of offenders, harden them while in custody. This has severe implications for the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria. While this objective also validates the earlier stated assumptions concerning reintegration, empirical evidence on how these mechanisms translate to the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria produced mixed results. For instance, few participants affirmed that these mechanisms fairly aid adequate reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, whereas, many of the participants refuted this fact, that these mechanisms did not yield a tangible result, considering the high rate of recidivism among offenders in Nigeria.

Furthermore, findings from this study show that offenders perpetuate recidivism partly because the rehabilitation mechanisms were too weak to reform them. This is consistent with the views of participants and observation of some newly released offenders, as the majority of them affirmed that despite the availability of institutional mechanisms such as vocational skills learning, educational (online distance learning), guidance and counselling, internship programmes, among others, offenders are hardly reformed and changed. This therefore has severe implications for the reintegration of offenders. Reintegration of offenders into society, should not have been problematic, if available institutional mechanisms, specifically designed to rehabilitate them are yielding positive outcomes. This finding is consistent with many of the empirical studies and observation reports that appraise the functionality of rehabilitation mechanisms in Nigerian Correctional Service ((Abiodun et al., 2021; Balsamo & Sisak, 2021; Onah, Adeniyi, & Eneh, 2019)). However, this study found mixed reactions among participants concerning the impacts of institutional mechanisms on the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria, which are classified into areas of good and poor compliance using structure, process, and outcome measuring indicators. Concerning areas of good compliance, the study found that most correctional institutions in Nigeria provide various institutional mechanisms, including empowerment of inmates through ICT, seconding inmates to work in local industries around the correctional institutions, provisions of vocational studies tools, among others. Provisions of these mechanisms no doubt show that the Nigerian Correctional Service committed itself to fair treatment and rehabilitation of inmates, which is consistent with the United Nations declaration for the treatment of prisoners, which mandates countries and their custodial institutions to provide humane treatment inmates. Nigerian Correctional Service also demonstrated its commitment through the creation of a special department, such as empowerment of inmates' department, in which the empowerment of convicted inmates remains their priority. It is also important to note that the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019, has mandated correctional institutions in the country to make provisions for effective rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The poor impact of institutional mechanisms on the proper reintegration of offenders is caused by overcrowding, poor funding, a shortage of skilled officers, a lack of proper coordination and supervision of the progress of inmates, low commitment of correctional officers, and societal perceptions or stereotyping of offenders, among others. Previous studies related to issues concerning the effective reintegration of offenders in Nigeria found that offenders, despite attending rehabilitation programmes, continue with their criminal behaviour. Issues on why offenders remained unrepentant of their anti-social behaviour, after release, are partly due to hostile reception from society, lack of tolerance of offenders, discrimination, lack of public orientation of members of society, among others (Suyatno et al., 2017; Ugwuoke, 2015; Otu, 2015; Obioha, 2011; Marcus, 2015; Ogadimma et al., 2015; Onyekachi, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The major findings of the study were that institutional mechanisms such as vocational skill learning, educational online distance learning, guidance and counselling, rotational job internship or placement, mental diagnosis and treatment, are among the available mechanisms in the Nigerian Correctional Service for the reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. It was discovered that despite these mechanisms, indicators of proper reintegration, such as fully reformed or transformation of anti-social behaviour of offenders, sober or repentant offenders, acceptance and tolerance of offenders, low recidivism, and improved capacity to secure a job, among others, are hardly seen after reintegration. The study found that the failure of these mechanisms to achieve these indicators is partly due to challenges such as overcrowding, poor funding, shortage of experienced, dedicated, and competent correctional officers to handle rehabilitation mechanisms, disconnect of correctional institutions from the society, weak public-private partnership, deplorable facilities and infrastructure, corruption, excessive reliance on spoilt-recruitment process, inhuman treatment of inmates, lack of clearly defined goal and objectives of rehabilitation programmes, among others. The study suggested decongestion of the population of inmates, drawing of a comprehensive and inclusive rehabilitation programme, concrete supervision and monitoring of the progress of inmates under rehabilitation, effective and purposeful connection between correctional institutions and society, among other strategies that can be deployed to address institutional challenges and enhance the proper reintegration of offenders in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abba, A. (2022). Prison break: Tracking 18 incidents of jailbreaks under President Buhari.
- Agbakwuru, O., Nnochiri, I. & Ojelu, H. (2021). Insecurity: F.G under attack over 3,906 fleeing inmates.
- Abiodun, T. F., Akinlade, M. T., Onyi, A. B., & Daramola, A. A. (2021). Recurrent waves of jailbreak in Nigeria: The imperatives of prison intelligence and dynamic security strategies in managing the Nigerian correctional facilities. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 8(5), pp.229-250
- Adetula G.A., Fatusin A. F (2010). The Prison Subsystem Culture: Its Attitudinal Effects on Operatives, Convicts, and the Free Society. *Gender and Behaviour* 18(1): 232-251
- Agan, A., & Starr, S. (2018). Ban the box, criminal records, and racial discrimination: A field experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(1), 191-235. Retrieved on August 24, 2022 from <https://bit.ly/3SwcU8E>
- Agunbiade, O.M. (2010). Prison health in Nigeria: A sociological discourse. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 7(2):38-41
- Agunyai, S.C., Marumo, P. O., Mothelesi, G.A (2019). Prison Administration and Human Security in Nigeria. *Gender and Behaviour* 17 (1), 12352-12366
- Bakken, N. W., & Visser, C. A. (2018). Successful reintegration and mental health: An examination of gender differences among reentering offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 45(8), 1121-1135. Retrieved on November 26, 2022 from <https://bit.ly/3SrN9GJ>
- Dissel, A. (2001). Prison Conditions in Africa. Research report written for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, September 2001.
- Ezeobi, C. (2022). Prison breaks in Nigeria, a ticking time bomb. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/07/11/prison-breaks-in-nigeria-a-ticking-time-bomb/>
- Falayi, K. & Ajaja, T. (2018). Nigerian prison cells where inmates live like kings, use co-prisoners as servants. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/nigerian-prison-cells-where-inmates-live-like-kings-use-co-prisoners-as-servants/>.
- Gibbons, J, and Katzenbach, N. (2006). Confronting confinement. The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, Vera Institute of Justice
- Habib, G. (2023). Imo jailbreak: 864 convicted murderers, rapists still on the run. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/imo-jailbreak-864-convicted-murderers-rapists-still-on-the-run/>.
- Handbook on Dynamic Security and Prison Intelligence (2015): Criminal Justice Handbook Series: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Hanniball, K. B., Akinin, L. B., Douglas, K. S., & Viljoen, J. L. (2019). Does helping promote well-being in at-risk youth and ex-offender samples. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 82, 307-317.
- 31) Heney, D. B. (2022). Solving for stigma in mental health care. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*.
- Herbert, C. W., Morenoff, J. D., & Harding, D. J. (2015). Homelessness and housing insecurity among former prisoners. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 1(2), 44-79
- Hindus, M. S. (2017). Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878. UNC Press Books.

- Hopkins, R. (2015). Tortured Mangaung Prisoners seek Justice. Mail Guardian News, 27 November. Accessed on June 25, 2018.
- Imam, H.I & Langa, S.A. (2019). Sociological analysis of the causes and effects of prison jail break in Kuje Mededium Security 157
- International Centre for Prison Studies (2011). ICPS News Digest 6th Edition
- Ismaila, S. (2020). Availability of Reformatory Education Programmes for Prisoners in North West Nigeria. UMT Education Review, 3(1), 01-24. Retrieved on August 25, 2022 from
- Marcus, A. A (2015). Prisoners' Rights under the Nigerian Law: Legal Pathways to Progressive Realization and Protection. Journal of Sustainable Development, Law & Policy 6 (1), 170-198
- Muntingh, L. (2007). Prisons in South Africa's Constitutional Democracy: The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Irish.
- Ndukwe C., and Nwuzor, C. I. (2014). Nigerian Prison Service (NPS) and the Challenges of Social Welfare Administration: A Study of Abakaliki Prison. Journal of Policy and Development Studies, 9(1): 20-28
- Obioha, E. E. (2011). Challenges and Reforms in the Nigerian Prisons System. Journal of Social Sciences, 27 (2): 95-109.
- Ogadimma, C. A', Adejumo Y. P., and Asamu F. F (2015). Causes and Effects of Violence in Nigerian Prisons, Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 1(4) 368-373
- Ogundipe, O. A. (2009). Prospect for the platform of prisons in democratic Nigeria, The reformer: A theoretical explanation. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 9(10). 93-97. bulletin of the Nigerian Prisons Service.
- Ojo. J. (2021). Solutions to serial jailbreaks in Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/solutions-to-serial-jailbreaks-in-nigeria/>. Accessed on 15 August, 2022.
- Omale, D.J. (2013). Riots/Jail breaks in Nigeria prisons: An aetiologial study. Canadian Social Science, 9(1). 158-164.
- Onah, O.O., Adeniyi, O. T. & Eneh, M.K. (2019). Increasing cases of prison breaks in Nigeria.
- Orakwe, I.W. (2011). Strategies for the attainment of prison reform within the context of the proposed criminal justice reforms. Journal of Nigerian Prison Service Reformer, 5(1), 81-100.
- Oroleye, A. K. (2018). Challenges of welfare administration of inmates in Nigeria prison system in SouthWestern Nigeria. International Journal of Politics and Good Governance Volume IX, (9); pp. 1-10
- Onyekachi, J. (2016). Problems and Prospects of the Administration of Nigerian Prisons: Need for Proper Rehabilitation of the Inmates in Nigerian Prisons, Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, 9231
- Ossai, N. (2022). Jailbreak in Nigeria: Causes, conditions, challenges and list of prisons. Retrieved from <https://www.skabash.com/jailbreak-in-nigeria/>. Accessed on 23rd January, 2023.
- Sarkin, J. (2008). An Overview of Human Rights in Prisons Worldwide. In Sarkin, J. (ed): Human Rights in African Prisons. Capetown, pp. 1-39
- Suyatno, L., Mohd, A. S., Nasa'I, M. G., Abd Majid, H. M., and Abdullahi, A. H. (2017). Human Security and Nigeria's Democracy in the 21st Century. World Applied Sciences Journal 35 (9): 1797-1803. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2017.1797.1803.
- Tapscott, C. (2009). Challenges to Good Prison Governance in Africa. In Sarkin, J. (ed): Human Rights in African Prisons. Capetown, pp 67-83
- Ugwuoke, K. A. (2015). An Aetiologial Study of Criminal Recidivism in Nigeria. Journal for Studies in Management and Planning, 1(11): 1-15