Humanities and Social Sciences Letters
2027 Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1-13
ISSN(e): 2312-4318
ISSN(p): 2312-5659
DOI: 10.18488/73.v15i1.5361
© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

The role of rehabilitation programmes in supporting offenders' academic success in South Africa

Pindiwe Christoleen Seloma

University of South Africa, South Africa.
Email: pseloma@unisa.ac.za



Article History
Received: 18 December 2025
Revised: 20 October 2026
Accepted: 6 November 2026
Published: 16 November 2026

Keywords
Academic success
Correctional education
Offender students
Rehabilitation programmes
Wellness.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how correctional rehabilitation programmes support incarcerated offenders' academic success in higher education institutions in South Africa. The investigation was conducted across nine correctional regions with the aim of assessing the efficacy of rehabilitation programmes in enhancing offenders' academic performance. The study was guided by two theoretical frameworks and one conceptual lens: the Risk–Need–Responsivity (RNR) model, which summarises the fundamental principles of effective rehabilitation and criminal behaviour; a wellness model, which emphasises individuals' well-being and covers emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, and physical wellness; and the African proverb Kgomo go tsoswa ye e itsosago ("Help comes to those who make an effort or take initiative"), which served as a foundation for understanding offenders' determination to pursue change despite challenging circumstances. A qualitative research methodology grounded in an interpretivist paradigm was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select nine correctional educators and 18 offender students. Data were collected through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The findings showed that offenders who had strong support systems and were committed to participating in rehabilitation programmes and pursuing their studies demonstrated transformative behavioural change compared with their initial state upon entering correctional facilities. Offender students took it upon themselves to take initiative and seek support through cognitive interventions, psychosocial support services, and wellness programmes to advance their personal growth. Consequently, their academic achievement improved significantly.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes for offenders in improving academic achievement and facilitating substantial changes in their behaviour, self-regulation, and coping strategies in the face of provocation. These findings suggest a transition towards prosocial conduct and improved emotional management through the integration of African wisdom with rehabilitation theories.

1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the comprehensive rehabilitation of offenders is a crucial objective of the correctional system, intended to empower individuals with the proficiency and insight needed for smooth reintegration into society after release from correctional facilities (Department of Correctional Services, 2012). Correctional support programmes seek to change offenders' behaviour and prevent future criminal activity through counselling, educational, and vocational programmes (Department of Correctional Services, 2023). Inadequate tailor-made rehabilitation programmes pose difficulties in addressing offenders' distinctive and unaddressed needs. However, offender

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

reintegration in the South African context is a complex, multi-layered challenge that requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing the social, economic, and educational needs associated with teaching and learning. Furthermore, strengthening the support provided to offenders improves academic success. South African correctional services have established structured rehabilitation programmes that include formal learning and development opportunities. Ward and Maruna (2007) argue that academic preparation is a fundamental element of rehabilitation, as it helps reduce reoffending rates and encourages offenders' intellectual development. Through diverse programmes, offenders develop entrepreneurial skills that improve their employability upon release. These programmes expand formal training and development opportunities through Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) initiatives offered in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (Department of Correctional Services, 2023). In line with the Correctional Services Act No. 111 of 1998, all educational programmes provided by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) must comply with the relevant legislation and policies of the DHET, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Despite the recognised importance of a wide range of restoration programmes in correctional education, limited research has examined how these programmes contribute to offenders' academic success from the perspectives of offender students and correctional educators within the South African correctional system.

1.1. Background to the Research Problem

The role of correctional rehabilitation programmes in supporting offenders' academic success is complex, as offenders' experiences differ depending on multifaceted, context-specific circumstances (Adams, Olsen, & Smith, 2017; Bottoms, 2018; McGuire, 2018; Taxman & Belenko, 2012). A lack of individualised and diverse rehabilitation programmes poses a serious challenge. Andrews and Bonta (2010); Morgan and Flanagan (2019); Taxman and Belenko (2012) and Wanigasundara and McCarthy (2017) emphasise the importance of individualised rehabilitation programmes in correctional facilities. They conclude that such programmes should respond to offenders' specific needs and individual risk factors. Given the need for individualised rehabilitation programmes, it is important to understand offenders' perceptions of the role of education and rehabilitation programmes. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how offenders perceive rehabilitation programmes in order to improve academic success and enhance educational support in South African correctional facilities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Global Impact of Correctional Education: An Overview

Recent literature on correctional education highlights lifelong learning and the important role of educational and rehabilitative programmes in assisting offenders' reintegration into society. Correctional facilities face challenges in ensuring equal access to quality education for all individuals. This challenge aligns with the principles outlined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015) and Sustainable Development Goal 4. The role of educational programmes in correctional facilities in preventing reoffending is addressed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018).

However, UNESCO (2019), the African Union Commission (2015), and the World Bank (2018) have documented persistent educational inequalities across African countries, despite initiatives aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Correctional education is widely recognised as an essential mechanism for improving offenders' lives and supporting their successful transition back into society (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015), as well as for implementing the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (2015); Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, and Miles (2013). Educational, rehabilitative, and vocational programmes empower offenders who seek to change their lives by providing learning opportunities from basic to tertiary levels (Muntingh, 2001). Recent findings

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

highlight the contribution of correctional education in African countries to advancing the United Nations 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4, by promoting lifelong learning opportunities and equitable, quality education that equips offenders with new knowledge and skills. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) further demonstrates how correctional education supports offenders' personal development (UNESCO, 2020).

Despite the various challenges offenders face, research shows that education plays a crucial role in enhancing their academic performance. The integration of correctional education, rehabilitation programmes and social support structures contributes to the holistic well-being of offenders (Grogol & Ross, 2016). A study by Roman and Chalfin (2008) showed that offenders who participated in educational programmes were 13% less likely to reoffend than those who were inactive participants. Furthermore, van Wyk (2014) points out that offenders' positive behavioural changes are influenced by improved educational qualifications, increased confidence, and enhanced self-esteem.

In 2010, the Namibian Correctional Services (NCS) became a professional correctional service focused on helping offenders rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. The NCS places a strong emphasis on quality education to encourage positive changes in behaviour and support offenders in building better futures. According to Fredericks, Mbukusa, and Tjibeba (2021), education supports positive development by helping offenders gain valuable skills that facilitate their reintegration into society.

In South Africa, the primary mandate of the DCS is to ensure the delivery of rehabilitation and effective reintegration programmes while providing offenders with a safe, secure, and humane environment to help reduce reoffending. The DCS's Annual Report 2024/25 highlights the department's alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, which emphasises the need to strengthen national capacity in basic, intermediate, and post-secondary education. In addition, the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, underscores the importance of basic education and skills development as essential tools for enhancing South Africans' capacity to tackle socio-economic issues such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty. The literature examined in this paper consistently shows that correctional education and rehabilitation programmes are important for fostering personal growth, academic success, behavioural change, and the effective reintegration of offenders into society. Studies from South Africa and other countries provide strong evidence that correctional education reduces reoffending and improves rehabilitation outcomes, but they provide scant coverage of how these programmes help offenders succeed in higher education. In addition, little is known about how correctional educationists view the role that rehabilitation programmes play in the academic success of offenders in South Africa's correctional facilities. By examining the viewpoints of both correctional educationists and student offenders, this study addresses these knowledge gaps and contributes to understanding academic achievement in South Africa's correctional facilities.

2.2. Transformative Behavioural Change

Transformative behavioural change is a complex process that requires diverse support structures, including family and friends. It takes considerable courage for an offender to adjust and willingly commit to personal transformation. Transformative behavioural change involves substantial and long-lasting shifts in individuals' behaviour, attitudes and values, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being and interpersonal relationships (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts, & Wardle, 2010; Rebar et al., 2016; Saxena & Sahai, 2025). Both offenders and educators must understand the factors that motivate behavioural change. According to Norman, Webb, and Millings (2019), adopting new perspectives can help individuals strengthen their communication skills, build resilience, and develop healthier relationships. Transformative behavioural change enhances offenders' academic performance and cultivates the resilience required to achieve success.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in the Risk–Need–Responsivity (RNR) model, which has served as a foundation for rehabilitative approaches in correctional systems worldwide. The RNR model has been expanded

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

within a comprehensive theory of criminal behaviour that integrates cognitive social learning and personality factors to evaluate and rehabilitate offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Applying the RNR model enabled the researcher to understand how rehabilitation programmes can be modified to meet offenders' diverse and unique needs, thereby promoting their academic success. Effective psychosocial support and rehabilitation programmes require correctional facilities to identify high-risk offenders, address specific needs arising from low educational attainment or learning difficulties, and promote their personal development (Steinberg, 2017; Taxman & Caudy, 2015). The study also draws on Hettler (1980) wellness model to examine holistic support for offender students. The wellness model entails occupational, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions, highlighting the importance of overall well-being. Conceptualising wellness in this manner acknowledges its influence on behavioural change, defining it as conscious, inclusive, evolving, holistic, multifaceted, affirming, and self-directed.

African philosophy serves as the foundation for the third lens in this study. It is based on the idea that true support is most effective when people demonstrate a willingness to assist themselves. Throughout history and tradition, African elders have used proverbs as wise and consoling guidance, drawing on their life experiences. Proverbs are valued for conveying meaningful messages through a blend of metaphor, myth, and pragmatism. This insight highlights offenders' worthiness, regardless of the wrongdoing they have committed. Meaningful transformation requires the courage and initiative to arise from within, fostering holistic personal growth. Using this perspective, the researcher investigated the triadic relationship among rehabilitation programmes, offenders' academic achievement, and offenders' readiness to take personal accountability for their own development.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Approach

This study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of student offenders and educators in a correctional environment (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Merriam, 2009). This approach was selected in view of the study's focus on complex, individualised, and context-dependent phenomena, such as human interactions, beliefs, and values, which align well with the interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2001). Specifically, the research examines the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes in influencing offenders' academic success in higher education within the South African correctional context. The study adopts a qualitative methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.2. Procedure for Selecting Participants

Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select participants with relevant knowledge and provide rich, comprehensive information to answer research questions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). A total of 27 participants, comprising 18 offender students studying at South African higher education institutions and 9 educators working at correctional facilities, were selected for this study. This multi-contextual regional approach fortifies the credibility and transferability of the findings. The sample size for this qualitative study was deemed appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive, detailed information from participants with direct lived experience of rehabilitation programmes in correctional facilities. This geographical representation enhanced the diversity of perspectives, which, in turn, increased and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. The saturation point was reached when the 27 participants provided no new information, at which point the interviews were stopped. The criteria used to select two offenders and one educator from each DCS region were based on the following: (i) offenders enrolled in diverse higher education qualifications at various South African institutions; (ii) offenders who participated in various rehabilitation programmes; and (iii) DCS educators with comprehensive teaching experience in correctional facilities who worked closely with offender students.

Data were collected from multiple DCS regions. The regions included in the study were the Eastern Cape (EC), the Free State (FS), Gauteng (GP), KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Limpopo (L), Mpumalanga (MP), the Northern Cape

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

(NC), North West (NW), and the Western Cape (WC). The educators were coded and referred to as EC/EDC01, MP/EDC02, GP/EDC03, WC/EDC04, KZN/EDC05, NW/EDC06, NC/EDC07, FS/EDC08, and L/EDC09, while the offenders were referred to as EC/OF01 and EC/OF02, MP/OF03 and MP/OF04, GP/OF05 and GP/OF06, WC/OF07 and WC/OF08, KZN/OF09 and KZN/OF10, NW/OF11 and NW/OF12, NC/OF13 and NC/OF14, FS/OF15 and FS/OF16, and L/OF17 and L/OF18.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to gain in-depth insights from offenders who participated in rehabilitation programmes and from correctional educationists. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed information and clarify participants' experiences. The research ethics committee and my supervisor reviewed the interview questions to confirm their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives before the commencement of data collection. Participants provided candid information about the phenomenon under examination. Offenders' responses yielded rich accounts of how they believed rehabilitation programmes helped them succeed academically (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences in a safe, non-judgemental environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.4. Data Analysis

The datasets collected from questionnaires and interviews with offenders and educationists were analysed. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. The researcher familiarised herself with the data through repeated readings of interview transcripts and questionnaire responses, generated initial codes using colour coding and categorisation, searched for emerging themes, reviewed and refined the themes, and finally defined and named the themes presented in the findings. This systematic process ensured that the themes accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The data analysis was conducted manually (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Henning, van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The thematic analysis of the data yielded the following key themes:

- Offenders' support structures enhance behavioural change.
- Contribution of integrated intervention programmes.
- Holistic transformation through rehabilitation programmes.
- Positive impact on offenders' academic performance and wellness.
- Enhanced professional growth through teaching and learning interventions.

3.5. Trustworthiness

The criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were applied to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Long-term engagement with participants and the use of multiple data-gathering techniques, such as semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys, enhanced credibility. Maintaining an accurate record of the research process and ensuring that study protocols were consistently followed throughout the research increased the study's reliability. Verbatim quotes from participants and methodical documentation of data analysis were used to support the conclusions. By providing readers with thorough explanations of the study's background, participant selection, and correctional settings, transferability improved, enabling readers to assess how well the results applied to similar contexts.

3.6. Reflexivity of Researchers

As a researcher, I consistently considered how my experiences, presumptions, and professional expertise would affect data collection, interpretation, and analysis while keeping an eye on my involvement in the research process.

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

To foster neutrality and ensure the results reflected participants' opinions rather than mine as a researcher, reflexive notes were kept throughout the study.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was acquired from both the Department of Correctional Services and the University of South Africa (UNISA) before the study began. The study was conducted ethically. Written informed consent was obtained from all 27 participants before data collection. A detailed discussion took place to emphasise the significance of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, and the participants were notified about the right to withdraw from the study at any time before signing the consent forms. To protect offenders' and DCS educators' identities, pseudonyms were assigned to identify the participants.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Theme 1: Offenders' Support Structures Enhance Behavioural Change

The DCS Educators commended offenders who had demonstrated behavioural improvement compared with their initial conduct and subsequently underscored the importance of adequate support systems for co-operative offenders. The findings suggest that family involvement, community involvement, peer support groups, and psychological support services promote collective support, increase offenders' likelihood of positive behaviour and make significant progress in their rehabilitation and personal development, including their academic performance. Correctional educators emphasised the importance of support networks that encourage offenders and promote behavioural change. A positive relationship between offender students and their educators is considered vital because it can reaffirm and strengthen the support offenders receive from their families.

NW/EDC06, from a North West correctional centre, said:

"… We find ourselves [becoming] sisters, mothers, psychologists, [as] we motivate them. As educationists, we are not only looking at education. You will find the whole week a man crying because he has not yet accepted his sentence. We provide comfort. Some of them call us mother; we celebrate when they go out[released]. We celebrate their birthdays."

The findings further reveal that support structures are an important pillar of strength, providing offenders with the confidence and determination needed to succeed in their rehabilitation efforts.

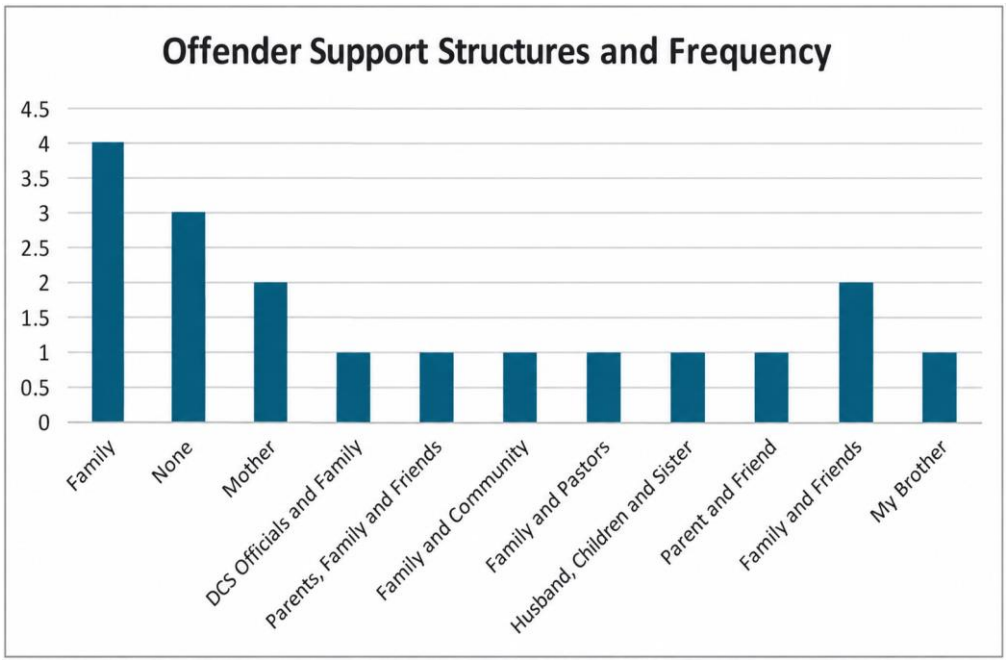


Figure 1. Offenders' support structures.

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

Figure 1 illustrates the different support structures available to offenders and their frequencies, ranging from zero to 4.5. It is notable that, of the 18 offender participants, three reported being rejected by their families and relying solely on correctional educators for support. The offenders lamented that navigating the rehabilitation process without family support is extremely difficult and stressed that support from their families would be more encouraging.

4.2. Theme 2: Contribution of Integrated Intervention Programmes

The findings underline the profound role that rehabilitation programmes play in offenders' lives. These programmes were regarded as pivotal in promoting positive behavioural change. Offender students benefit from collaboration and constructive support provided by correctional educators, service providers, and psychological professionals who offer social, emotional, and academic guidance. This multidimensional support positively influences offenders' reintegration into society. Furthermore, these findings highlight the interconnectedness among educational institutions, correctional resources despite limited access, rehabilitation intervention programmes, the restorative justice system, and offenders' personal development. These findings further demonstrate the value of a holistic rehabilitation approach and the necessity of addressing offenders' diverse risk-related needs. From a Mpumalanga correctional centre, MP/EDC02 remarked.

"… Offenders undergo anger management or emotional regulation programmes; they become more focused and able to control their impulses, which is essential for studying effectively".

From an Eastern Cape correctional centre, EC/EDC01, KwaZulu-Natal correctional centre, KZN/EDC05 expressed similar views.

"Education empowers offenders with knowledge and skills that help them [to] … reintegrate into society. Those who participate in these programmes often experience personal growth and transformation. These programmes help offenders gain education, develop skills and reduce their likelihood of reoffending."

These results show that combined educational, psychological, and social interventions are the most effective form of rehabilitation. Research indicates that addressing offenders' needs improves academic performance and rehabilitation outcomes, underscoring the importance of integrated support in correctional settings.

4.3. Theme 3: Holistic Transformation Through Rehabilitation Programmes

The findings draw attention to the comprehensive academic rehabilitation programmes that address the key contributing factors of offenders' behaviour, including substance abuse, mental health conditions, and socio-economic inequalities. Offender students emphasised the transformative impact of the diverse programmes offered. For example, offenders from an Eastern Cape correctional centre, EC/OF01 and EC/OF02, stated:

"To realise my mistakes and aim to be a better person". These programmes help me to transform my mindset. It would have been difficult and probably impossible for me to advance if these interventions were not introduced".

A newfound passion for learning is reflected in the words of a participant from a Gauteng correctional centre, GP/OF06 said:

"Transformed me – the way I think and talk – and developed an interest in studying, to be myself again."

This is a striking assertion, suggesting that the participant felt detached from their identity and that the guidance provided within the correctional environment helped them to rebuild a sense of self-confidence.

4.4. Theme 4: Positive Impact on Offenders' Academic Performance and Wellness

The findings demonstrate the constructive influence of wellness-oriented approaches that complement the educational components of rehabilitation. Offenders reported maintaining holistic wellness and balance in their lives as well as being productive. From a Mpumalanga correctional centre, MP/OF03 remarked:

"It contributes to my academic performance."

From a North West correctional centre, NW/OF11 commented:

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

"I balance my study schedule with other intervention programmes by adjusting my study time. Usually, I study before and after lock-up."

Another participant from a North West correctional centre, NW/OF12, said:

"Teaching us how to plan our studies and still attend rehabilitation programmes."

From a Western Cape correctional centre, WC/OF07 emphasised the importance of a positive attitude towards learning in promoting academic success and lifelong learning, stating:

"These intervention measures provided by the Department of Correctional Services have not only supported my academic progress … [but also] inspired me to pursue lifelong learning."

Overall, the results indicate that involvement in rehabilitation programmes enhances academic engagement, study habits, and overall well-being among offenders. It is evident that combining wellness interventions with educational support enables offenders to pursue their academic objectives more successfully.

4.5. Theme 5: Enhanced Professional Growth Through Teaching and Learning Interventions

Most offenders testified that their involvement in studies and attainment of qualifications enabled them to develop tutoring skills in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and confidently support other students at lower levels. Those who focused on learning exhibited strength, balance, and resilience. Hence, many indicated that these interventions helped them grow personally and become more cognisant of their development. These rehabilitation interventions sustained their professional growth and enhanced their learning. Offenders demonstrated academic potential, pursued their interests, and hoped for better lives through personal empowerment. For example, EC/OF01 from the Eastern Cape said:

"I study this degree because my objective is to be self-employed and a businessman."

WC/OF07 from the Western Cape mentioned that:

"I would like to study further up until the Doctor of Philosophy because I would like to share the knowledge I have [With] others. From my study I learned a lot because I gained enough about my development, getting a deeper understanding of physical, emotional, and social development, and dealing with anger [Issues], which helped me to identify and address challenges faced by children. I aspire to be a teacher and influence [The] youth."

5. DISCUSSION

These results align with Maruna and LeBel (2020) study, which found that offenders who received support from friends and family were more likely to achieve favourable outcomes. Family and psychological support, therefore, have the potential to facilitate positive behavioural change and to contribute to improved offenders' attitudes. However, offenders must also possess the courage and willingness to rise and transform their lives. Offenders' Support Structures implies that individuals may rely on available alternative sources of social support when the one they need most is unavailable.

These responses collectively emphasise the positive contribution of academic rehabilitation programmes in empowering and transforming offenders who participate in educational programmes. This aligns with Richardson (2019) and Duckworth and Seligman (2017), who assert that students who receive emotional support experience reduced stress levels and improved academic performance. In addition, offenders' personal development and acquisition of new vocational skills are strengthened through their participation in these programmes. Interventions such as anger management, stress management, social and psychological services, social work programmes, restorative justice, substance abuse programmes and vocational skills training, including beading, furniture crafts, and dressmaking, were identified by both offenders and correctional educators as among the most beneficial components of rehabilitation offerings. Correspondingly, these programmes contribute to social reintegration and offer emotional and psychosocial support that has an impact on long-term benefits for offenders. The participants' statements indicate that through rehabilitation programmes, along with education, counselling and vocational

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

training, offenders acquire new skills that support their reintegration into their communities. These findings are consistent with studies by Vandala (2019); Hagan and Harris (2020) and Rex (2020), which found that correctional education has a transformative impact on offenders. However, Vandala (2019) and Mota and Tembo (2025) caution that claims about offender transformation through correctional education must be contextualised within the challenges encountered in rehabilitation programmes. Nonetheless, these findings corroborate the study objectives and support the participants' transformation through intensive rehabilitation and academic programmes.

These results correspond to those obtained by Grogger (2017) and Kim (2019), who advocate for the incorporation of wellness programmes into correctional education to enhance offenders' academic performance. Offender students reported being taught a range of skills to help them sustain themselves upon release. In contrast, the findings revealed the stigmatisation that prevents employers from hiring ex-offenders. Conversely, these findings suggest a need for advocacy to preserve offenders' diverse skills and support their independence. Many also developed consistent study routines that helped them remain focused and organised, which was instrumental in improving their academic performance. Some offenders reported never failing a module, while others indicated that their pass rates had improved considerably. Offenders noted that, by establishing structured study schedules, they broke complex scholarly work into manageable sections, thereby reducing stress and anxiety and demonstrating intellectual independence. They also used the various forms of support provided by the DCS to advance their studies. Studies by Vandala (2017) and Nkambule and van Niekerk (2019) similarly highlight the value of intervention support programmes in improving academic performance and facilitating offenders' reintegration into society, corroborating these findings.

The findings further suggest that many participants recognised that education is about more than just personal achievement; it is also about encouraging others to learn and flourish. This is consistent with Okeke (2017) argument that education is worth sharing. Hence, Gauteng correctional offender GP/OF06 suggests that they have developed empathy and compassion toward peers who may face academic challenges and can offer possible solutions. Offender participants' responses highlight the importance of sharing knowledge and supporting others' learning. They also indicate that offenders have developed a sense of selflessness and a desire to positively influence others—qualities nurtured through their educational experiences. These results show that rehabilitation programmes support leadership, mentoring, and career goals in addition to academic achievement. Participants' dedication to helping others learn exemplifies the broader societal benefits of educational rehabilitation in correctional settings.

The sentiments expressed by offender participants suggest that, without personal growth and development, they would feel lost and directionless. This illustrates the African philosophical idea that genuine personal development starts with a person's readiness to accept support from others and take charge of their own transformation. While the DCS support system provides opportunities for personal growth and change, offenders must decide to start afresh. Although participants' use of the word "helpless" highlights the significance of well-being and their ability to survive life's challenges, their remarks emphasise the value of self-improvement and progress in achieving fulfilment and a sense of positive purpose. The findings suggest that their experiences within correctional services have changed their perspectives, mindsets, and worldviews as they gained new insights and learned new skills.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that rehabilitation programmes, integrated intervention initiatives, and support systems play important roles in improving offenders' behaviour. The results highlight the value of a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy that meets offenders' personal and academic needs while also supporting their professional development in preparation for future endeavours. Kim, Lee, and Kim (2015) reported similar findings regarding the effectiveness of holistic rehabilitation programmes aligned with psychological support services in transforming offenders' lives. The positive impact of these programmes on offenders' academic achievement and well-being underscores their importance in facilitating a smooth transition back into society and providing a strong

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

support structure. This study contributes to the existing body of research on rehabilitation programmes and emphasises the necessity of balanced wellness for optimal performance and social interaction with peers and relevant stakeholders. The study suggests that offenders who participate in educational rehabilitation programmes demonstrate resilience and determination to improve their lives, despite the challenges within the DCS.

This study also shows that educational rehabilitation fosters successful social reintegration, behavioural change, personal development, and academic achievement. The results emphasise the significance of comprehensive systems of social, psychological, and educational support that address the many needs of offenders. In addition to increasing academic achievement, strengthening these interventions will reduce reoffending and better prepare offenders for meaningful engagement in society.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerge from the findings.

- In addition to the existing DCS computer laboratories in some correctional facilities, universities should establish fully equipped teacher centres within correctional facilities and monitor these centres to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.
- Universities should deploy information and communications technology coordinators to assist offenders with technical challenges when using digital learning platforms and search engines.
- Universities should expand information technology (IT) training for both offenders and DCS educators to enhance teaching and learning in correctional facilities. Improved IT skills will also support offenders' reintegration into society by equipping them with relevant digital competencies.

Funding: This study received financial support from the Master's and Doctorate Programme Institutional Vetting Committee (IVC) at the University of South Africa, South Africa (Grant No. MDSP2_2024_1613; approval date: 13 June 2024).
Institutional Review Board Statement: The Institutional Review Board of the University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa, granted ethical approval for this study on 13 March 2024 (Ref. No. 2024/03/13/36859605/01/AM). Additional ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Correctional Services, South Africa (Ref. No. REC 2024).
Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent was obtained from all 27 participants before data collection and all data were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.
Transparency: The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.
Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.
Disclosure of AI Use: The author used the Grammarly tool to assist with language editing, improving sentence structure, and enhancing the manuscript's clarity. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

Adams, K., Olsen, S., & Smith, S. (2017). The impact of contextual factors on the effectiveness of correctional education programs. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *68*(1), 34–51.

African Union Commission. (2015). *Continental education strategy for Africa 2016–2025 (CESA 16–25)*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union Commission.

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2006). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (4th ed.). Newark, NJ: Anderson Publishing.

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (5th ed.). New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis/Anderson Publishing.

Bottoms, A. (2018). Contextualizing offender rehabilitation: The importance of social and environmental factors. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *57*(4), 331–354.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Department of Correctional Services. (2012). *Annual report 2011/2012*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Correctional Services.

Department of Correctional Services. (2023). *Annual report 2022/2023*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Correctional Services.

Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2017). The science and practice of self-control. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(5), 715-718. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617690880

Fredericks, B., Mbukusa, N., & Tjibeba, H. R. (2021). Reintegrating released and rehabilitated offenders: A case of Windhoek Correctional Facility on Khomas Region, Namibia. *Journal of Philosophy and Culture, 9*(2), 20–27.

Grant, B. M., & Giddings, L. S. (2002). Making sense of methodologies: A paradigm framework for the novice researcher. *Contemporary Nurse, 13*(1), 10–28. https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.13.1.10

Grogger, J. T. (2017). The relationship between offender education and wellness. *Journal of Correctional Education, 68*(2), 148–162.

Grogol, E. M., & Ross, M. W. (2016). Holistic correctional intervention: A review of the literature. *Journal of Correctional Education, 67*(2), 148–164.

Hagan, P., & Harris, R. (2020). Education and desistance: A systematic review. *Journal of Education and Criminal Justice, 10*(1), 1–20.

Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2017). *Leadership on the line, with a new preface: Staying alive through the dangers of change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Henning, E., van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Hettler, B. (1980). Wellness promotion on a university campus. *Family & Community Health, 3*(1), 77–95. https://doi.org/10.1097/00003727-198005000-00008

Kim, C. (2019). The impact of wellness-based interventions on offender recidivism rates. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 56*(5), 637–652.

Kim, C., Lee, S., & Kim, B. (2015). The effects of a holistic rehabilitation program on the recidivism of offenders. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory, 3*(2), 15–28.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C. H. M., Potts, H. W. W., & Wardle, J. (2010). How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*(6), 998–1009. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Maruna, S., & LeBel, T. P. (2020). The role of social support in offender rehabilitation. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 57*(1), 15–35.

McGuire, J. (2018). The multifaceted nature of offender rehabilitation: A review of the literature. *Journal of Correctional Education, 69*(2), 147–168.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Morgan, R. D., & Flanagan, N. (2019). Tailoring rehabilitation programs to address the specific needs of diverse offender populations. *Journal of Correctional Education, 70*(1), 34–54.

Mota, R. P., & Tembo, M. (2025). Transformative outcome of correctional education on ex-offenders in Mzimba, Malawi. *Journal of Prison Education Research, 9*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.25771/70fx-az49

Muntingh, L. (2001). *After prison: The case for offender reintegration*. ISS Monograph No. 52. Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies.

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

Nkambule, T. T., & van Niekerk, A. (2019). Correctional services' intervention measures: A study on the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. *Journal of Criminology, 14*(1), 1–15.

Norman, P., Webb, T. L., & Millings, A. (2019). Using the theory of planned behaviour and implementation intentions to reduce binge drinking in new university students. *Psychology & Health, 34*(4), 478-496. https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2018.1544369

Okeke, E. A. (2017). The impact of peer support on academic achievement in Nigerian universities. *Journal of Education and Practice, 8*(15), 12–20.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rebar, A. L., Dimmock, J. A., Jackson, B., Rhodes, R. E., Kates, A., Starling, J., & Vandelanotte, C. (2016). A systematic review of the effects of non-conscious regulatory processes in physical activity. *Health Psychology Review, 10*(4), 395-407. https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2016.1183505

Rex, S. (2020). Transforming offenders through restorative justice. *Restorative Justice, 8*(1), 34–51.

Richardson, M. (2019). The impact of emotional stress on offender rehabilitation. *Journal of Criminological Research, 17*(2), 123–135.

Roman, J. K., & Chalfin, A. (2008). Has demand for crime increased? The prevalence of personal media devices and the robbery spike in 2005 and 2006. *American Criminal Law Review, 45*(3), 1149–1166.

Saxena, K., & Sahai, A. (2025). Understanding the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural therapy: A study on offenders. *Annals of Neurosciences, 32*(4), 309-314. https://doi.org/10.1177/09727531241288609

Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Steinberg, L. (2017). Adolescent brain science and juvenile justice policymaking. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 23*(4), 410–420. https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000128

Taxman, F. S., & Belenko, S. (2012). *Implementing evidence-based practices in community corrections and addiction treatment.* New York, NY: Springer.

Taxman, F. S., & Caudy, M. S. (2015). Risk tells us who, but not what or how: Empirical assessment of the complexity of criminogenic needs to inform correctional programming. *Criminology & Public Policy, 14*(1), 71-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12116

UNESCO. (2019). *Global convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education.* Paris, France: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Latin America and the Caribbean—Inclusion and education: All means all.* Paris, France: UNESCO.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015). *Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.* Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4

United Nations General Assembly. (2015). *United Nations standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) (A/RES/70/175).* New York, NY: United Nations.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *Study on the effects of new information technologies on the abuse and exploitation of children.* New York, NY: United Nations.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). *Drug use in Nigeria.* Vienna, Austria: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

van Wyk, S. A. (2014). From incarceration to successful reintegration: An ethnographic study of the impact of a halfway house on recidivism amongst female ex-offenders. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Vandala, N. G. (2017). *The transformative effect of education programmes as perceived by ex-offenders.* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

Vandala, N. G. (2019). The transformative effect of correctional education: A global perspective. *Cogent Social Sciences, 5*(1), 1677122. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1677122

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.

Wanigasundara, I., & McCarthy, B. (2017). The role of assessment in tailoring rehabilitation programs to offenders' needs. *Journal of Correctional Education, 68*(2), 147–164.

Ward, T., & Maruna, S. (2007). *Rehabilitation: Beyond the risk paradigm.* London, England: Routledge.

World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), Humanities and Social Sciences Letters shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.

© 2027 Conscientia Beam. All Rights Reserved.