



3-30-2025

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### Recommended Citation

Mota, R. P., & Tembo, M. (2025). Transformative Outcome of Correctional Education on Ex-offenders in Mzimba, Malawi. *Journal of Prison Education Research*, 9(1). Retrieved from <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/joper/vol9/iss1/2>

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## Transformative Outcome of Correctional Education on Ex-offenders in Mzimba, Malawi

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**Abstract:** *Malawi Prison Service offers correctional education programmes to the incarcerated individuals as a vital component of crime fighting strategy. Although the role of correctional education is to fight crimes, relapse in criminal behaviour which results in the re-incarceration of ex-offenders continues to be a predicament, thereby questioning the relevance of correctional education programmes after imprisonment. Therefore, this mixed methods study analysed the transformative outcome of correctional education programmes on ex-offenders in Mzimba, Malawi using the empowerment theory. The study utilised questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews as data collection tools, whereby quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 20 while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Quantitative findings revealed that there is positive correlation between correctional education and successful re-integration of ex-offenders. On the other hand, the study found that criminal record negatively correlated with ex-offenders employability. Qualitative findings confirm that correctional education improves socio-economic status, behaviour and offender re-integration upon release. The study recommends that Malawi prison service should partner with other stakeholders in designing and implementing correctional education programmes.*

**Keywords:** *Correctional Education, Ex-offenders, Re-intergration, Relapse, Mzimba*

### Introduction

In 1994, Malawi adopted a democratic constitution, the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (the Constitution), and one of the fundamental changes brought by this development was the recognition of human rights for all, including incarcerated persons (Malawi Law Society, 2019). Section 25 of the Constitution provides that “*All persons are entitled to education.*” The right to education is also guaranteed in a variety of regional and international instruments that Malawi is a party to. These instruments include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR).

As regards the right to education for incarcerated persons, Malawi in general, and the Malawi Prisons Service (MPS) in particular, is under obligation to offer incarcerated persons correctional education programmes (Malawi Government, 2010), and allow incarcerated persons to take part in various cultural and educational activities to enable them achieve wholistic development (Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, United Nations 2015)

Despite the incarcerated persons being offered correctional education programmes and engaged in educational activities, some of them still re-offend, and consequently they are re-incarcerated. As such, this results in the rampant continued re-incarceration of ex-offenders (Malawi Prisons Service, 2019), which



questions the relevance of correctional education programmes upon release from prison.

A good number of scholars in Malawi have done studies on the impact of correctional education programmes on inmates in prisons including those prisons in the Northern Region of Malawi. Gama et al., (2020) examined the information behaviour of inmates at Mzimba Maximum Prison, whereas Chapuwala (2005), Kajawo (2019), Kajawo and Nyirongo (2022), Kajawo and Johnson (2023), Salima (2017) analysed the history, management and effects of correctional education programmes on incarcerated individuals in Malawian prisons. However, most of the studies have focused much on the effects of correctional education programmes on incarcerated persons whilst still in the ‘inmate’ condition. This explicitly shows that gaps still exist in the literature on the impact of correctional education on released convicts in the society. Hence, the need to analyse the benefits of correctional education programmes on convicts upon release from prison. Rowlands (1997) argues that correctional education programmes should help incarcerated persons acquire skills and capacity to gain control over their lives without sabotaging the rights of others. Through the acquisition of various skills, inmates can increase their self-reliance and internal strength. Therefore, this article, analyses the transformative outcome of correctional education programmes on ex-offenders.

The article ought to answer the two questions. The first question is: how do ex-offenders apply knowledge and skills acquired in prison upon their release? The second question is: how do ex-offenders perceive correctional education programmes offered in prisons?

Understanding how ex-offenders utilize knowledge and skills obtained whilst incarcerated is vital in curbing relapse in criminal behaviours, hence contributing towards crime reduction in the country. This is so because approximately ninety five percent of the incarcerated persons in Malawi have definite sentences (Malawi Prisons Service, 2019). Consequently, there is a need to understand how ex-offenders apply and perceive correctional education programmes so that prison authorities can design and implement successful programmes.

## Literature Review

### *Correctional Education Viewpoints*

A correctional education programme refers to any activity that is aimed at providing incarcerated persons with specific knowledge and skills to gain control over their lives (Msoroka, 2018). These programmes include but not limited to academic, vocational and technical skills training offered to incarcerated persons. Scholars view correctional education programmes in two different folds: “(a) an idealistic/optimistic (what works) view and (b) a pessimistic (nothing works) view” (Ubah & Robinson, 2003). On one hand the proponents of “what works” view believe that correctional education programmes transform the criminal mentality of offenders. For instance, Chappell (2004) and Gordonís (2003) argue that prisoners who are educated experience beneficial effects on post release employment. Further, they state that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the reduction of recidivism. On the other hand, proponents of “nothing works” view believe that correctional education does not transform the criminal mentality of offenders. In their study, entitled “Disentangling the Effects of Correctional Education” Batiuk et al. (2005), found that correctional education does not work, meaning that juvenile and adult prison education programmes do not cause significant reductions in recidivism rate. Therefore, the results on the perspectives of correctional education programmes are inconclusive and require further research.

### *Effects of correctional education:*

#### *Global*

Globally, most studies on the effect of correctional education programmes show positive results on incarcerated persons. Hughes (2009), and Hunte and Esmail (2021) revealed that correctional education relieves prison boredom, helps prisoners cope with the pains and deprivations of prison life and more importantly shifts incarcerated persons away from offending behaviour to becoming productive members of society. Thus, supporting the “what works” philosophy of correctional education as it plays a crucial role in reducing

crime by providing ex-offenders with alternative to criminal activities.

Davis et al. (2013), Duwe (2017); and Mackenzie (2020) acknowledge that incarcerated individuals who attend correctional education are less likely to commit crime because they are able to acquire daily needs in a pro-social manner upon expiry of their sentences. This is to say that the programmes empower incarcerated individuals become self-reliant, problem solvers and decision makers upon exiting from prison. Therefore, correctional education is a prerequisite to a stable crime free life of ex-offenders hence, an increase in offender knowledge and skills increases their productivity which in turn contributes to the economy of their respective communities (Nieuwenhuizen, 2014).

### *African*

Most studies done in Africa correspond to the global findings that participating in correctional education programmes can reduce relapse into criminal behaviour which in return leads to re-incarceration of ex-offenders (Dorcus, 2022; Fakude, 2012; Muasya, 2013; Msoroka, 2018; Stickle & Schuster, 2023; Vandala, 2019). Although, the findings in Africa positively correlates with global findings, correctional education in most countries meet with a lot of challenges ranging from financial, human resources and policy guidelines which in return leads to poor quality programmes (Dorcus, 2022; Fakude, 2012; Msoroka, 2018). For instance, most African countries lack correctional education policy guidelines as a result the programmes are implemented haphazardly.

Though most scholars in Africa argue that correctional education programmes are poor and leave a lot to be desired, the programmes still produce good results in assisting incarcerated persons to successful re-integration. For instance, Vandala (2019) in her study which was conducted in the Republic of South Africa found that the majority of incarcerated persons who attend correctional education programmes displayed improved behavioral change and became productive citizens upon their release.

### *Malawi*

In Malawi, most correctional education studies that have been done focus on the incarcerated individuals (Kajawo & Johnson, 2023; Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022; and Salima, 2017). For instance, Kajawo and Johnson (2023) did a study which discussed the theoretical and practical aspects of education given to incarcerated young people in Malawi while Kajawo and Nyirongo (2022) discussed education of people behind bars in Malawi. Additionally, Salima (2017) did a study which sought to find out the impact of technical and vocational education on male prisoners. He found that correctional education has a positive impact on the lives of offenders which would make them self-reliant upon release. To illustrate this point, the author stated that the offenders could be making chairs, window frames, welding materials and clothes and sale to people. However, literature is silent on formerly incarcerated individuals or ex-offenders. Therefore, the present study sought to assess the transformative outcome of correctional education programmes on ex-offenders in Malawi from empowerment viewpoint.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework which underpins this study is the empowerment theory. Mechanic (1991) defines empowerment as a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship of their efforts and life outcomes. Basically, empowerment theory provides principles and a framework for organizing our knowledge to influence decisions that affect our daily life (Rappaport, 1981; 1984). This theory is about giving individuals the tools, resources and confidence they need to have control over their lives, as it emphasizes on self-determination, personal growth and active participation in decision making (Ward & Marshall, 2004). To understand the empowerment theory, there is need to differentiate between empowering processes and empowering outcomes (Swift & Levine, 1987). Zimmerman (1993) defines empowering processes as activities, interventions or programmes in which people participate to gain control of their lives or environment and empowering outcomes as the operationalized effects of empowering processes. The process is said to be empowering if it assists individuals develop knowledge and skills so they can become independent problem solvers and decision makers. Although a theory of empowerment encompasses both processes and outcomes, different behaviors, actions, or activities

can lead to varying levels of empowerment for different individuals. Therefore, empowerment is context and population specific because it takes on different forms for different people in different contexts (Zimmerman, 2000).

In reformatory centres, incarcerated persons are given correctional education with the aim of assisting them acquire knowledge and skills to gain control over their lives and living a crime-free life upon release (Ward & Marshall, 2004). As most scholars attribute the high level of crime to school failure, and lack of work skills as the most consistent precursors of criminality. Farley and Pike (2018) argue that provision of correctional education to incarcerated persons is the most consistent way of empowering them to develop skills and embrace long-term pro-social life styles. This is why it is argued that correctional education is a pillar of effective rehabilitation and empowerment of incarcerated persons (Gehring, 2017).

The use of empowerment theory for the study is relevant because it relates with correctional education by fostering personal growth, self-determination and the ability to overcome obstacles and allow incarcerated persons to take control of their future. Therefore, this reduces the chances of released convicts from returning to criminal activities. Upon release, these persons contribute positively to the development of their respective communities. Furthermore, the theory guides scholars in the academic arena as well as the entire society in analysing how the poor, marginalised and powerless people in the incarcerated context can effectively change their conditions upon release from prison (Rowlands, 1997). Through participating in different correctional education programmes incarcerated persons acquire different knowledge and skills which can be translated into action upon release from prison. For instance, knowledge and skills obtained whilst incarcerated can be applied to secure employment, venture into self-employment or further education. Consequently, released convicts would be self-reliant upon release from prison. Basically, the empowerment process transforms incarcerated persons into developing basic confidence in their ability to achieve what they have decided to achieve in a pro-social manner.

## **Methodology**

The present study adopted mixed methods design in order to have a thorough comparison and analysis of the outcomes quantitatively and qualitatively that would guide researchers to come up with relevant conclusions from the findings made. Mixed methods design was used to enable researchers not to only depend on one technique but several techniques (Creswell, 2014). The study separately generated and analysed quantitative and qualitative data. The two data sets were later compared and aggregated as part of the interpretation of findings using the convergent design (Roni et al., 2020). Subsequently, the quantitative data was triangulated and validated with qualitative data. Clark and Creswell (2015) and Guetterman (2017) argued that the use of quantity and quality variables in understanding a phenomenon strengthens data interpretation of the study.

### ***Study Population***

The main population in this study was ex-offenders released from Mzimba Maximum Prison in Malawi. Criteria used for selecting ex-offenders involved; (1) being an ex-offender; (2) who attended correction education programmes regardless of the offence at Mzimba Maximum Prison; (3) released from lawful custody between 2014 and 2019. A total of 150 ex-offenders met the criteria above.

Additionally, correctional officers also formed part of the study. These officers were chosen for being attached to the correctional education section at Mzimba Maximum Prison.

Furthermore, employers of the ex-offenders in question participated in the study. These employers were chosen based on the number of employees they had. Only those employers who had more than 10 employees including the ex-offenders took part in the study.

### ***Sample Size***

The sample of the study was based on 95% confidence level and margin error of 5%, and the sample size was determined using formula by Yamane (1967):

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where:

$n$  is sample size,

$N$  is the population size and

$e$  is the level of precision or sampling error.

Basically, Sample Size ( $n$ ) was the number of ex-offenders that were included in the study to achieve the desired level of precision while Population Size ( $N$ ) represented the total number of individuals in the population niche of the study (ex-offenders), and Level of Precision ( $e$ ) was the desired level of sampling error expressed as a decimal. For instance, the marginal error for the study was slotted at 0.05. Thus, level of precision represents the acceptable difference between the sample size and the population parameter of the study.

The study utilised both probability and non-probability sampling techniques of simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Ex-offenders were chosen using simple random sampling technique whereas correctional officers and employers were selected using purposive sampling.

**Table 1: The breakdown of number of respondents for the study**

Population	Number of respondents
Ex-offenders	74
Correctional Officers	15
Employers	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>

**Source:** Researchers' own compilation, 2023

Table 1 shows the breakdown of number of responses for the study. This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods using questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Questionnaires and FGDs were used to collect data from ex-offenders whereas in-depth interviews were used to collect data from correctional officers and employers. Data from 50 ex-offenders out of the total 74 ex-offenders was collected using questionnaires whereas data from the remaining 24 ex-offenders was collected through FGDs.

The questionnaire was designed to capture both nominal and ordinal data, and contained demographic items such as age, gender, marital status and level of education. This was followed by other items covering the current research scope with a 5-point Likert Scale and open-ended response spaces to complement close-ended items' options, which were used to measure a number of variables not limited to: ex-offenders' knowledge application and relevance of correctional education offered in prison in the community they re-integrated. Additionally, the study used FGDs and in-depth interviews to explore further explanatory insight into the study. Arrangements were made to conduct a thirty minute long semi-formal session of discussions and interviews whereby the moderator was guided by a checklist and interview guide, but where additional stimulating and beneficial points emerged, these were further pursued. All FGDs and in-depth interviews sessions were recorded by using an audio-recorder.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data with the help of SPSS, Version 20 while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data by following the six-step process set out by Braun and Clarke (2013), namely familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining/naming themes, and producing the report. Quantitative and qualitative results were compared and interpretations were made as to whether or not the findings support or contradict

each other to successfully inform the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2012).

### Ethical Declaration

Consent to conduct this study was sought before data was collected. The researchers obtained ethical clearance (Ref No: DOR/22/74) from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC). Further an approval was sought from the Malawi Prisons Service for the researchers to involve ex-offenders and prison officers in the study. Study participants were asked to sign consent forms and briefed on the purpose of the study. Participation was purely voluntary and withdrawal at any point was accepted. The collected data was carefully handled and secured whilst observing the privacy of the participants. All data and information not obtained within the scope of this study has been cited and included in the references. In addition, the researchers complied with ethical duties and responsibilities by accepting all the terms and conditions of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

### Findings and Discussions

The study aimed at analysing the transformative outcome of correctional education on ex-offenders who were released from Mzimba Maximum Prison in Malawi between 2014 and 2019 by using the empowerment theory. The quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed and reported under two domains: ex-offenders' application of correctional education and ex-offenders' perception of correctional education.

#### *Ex-offenders' application of correctional education*

Quantitative results revealed that 90% of the ex-offenders were applying the knowledge and skills obtained from prison in their respective communities upon their release from prison. Table 2 shows the kind of knowledge and skills they applied. This finding was supported by qualitative findings where discussants were asked if they were applying knowledge and skills they obtained whilst incarcerated at Mzimba Maximum Prison. The discussants unanimously resonated that they were applying the knowledge and skills they obtained in prison. Further to that, they narrated that some of them were able to open their own shops. For instance, some had opened carpentry and tailoring shops, while others were proceeding with their studies and managed to secure employment.

**Table: 2 Nexus between programme attended and knowledge application**

Programme attended and knowledge application	Chi-Square	P Value	Results
Adult Basic Education → Employment	5.213	0.022	significant
GDE→Self-employment+Continuing Education	11.40; 21.71	0.001; 0.000	Significant
VE→ Self-employment+ Continuing Education	3.96; 4.537	0.047; 0.033	Significant
Life skills → Self-employment	3.675	0.054	significant

**Notes:** The results of P-Values of the variables under 0.01 and 0.05 are considered as significant at 99% and 95% confidence level respectively.

One discussant narrated that:

*“Yes, I do apply the knowledge and skills. With the knowledge and skills, I obtained from prison I managed to venture into farming as I am saying, people in my community buy assorted farm produce, such as vegetables from me.*

This participant had attended Life Skills Program in prison where he was taught farming. Upon being released from the prison, he went home and asked his parents to share him a piece of land for farming. He used the land for horticulture. During FGDs’ session the same participant narrated that most of his colleagues in their community adore him for his undertaking. He added that before being incarcerated, he spent most of his time intoxicating himself with drugs and alcohol.

Another discussant narrated that:

*“Due to participation in correctional education, I am now a well-qualified carpenter. I partnered with my friend and we are running our own carpentry shop and we are having so many customers”.*

Yet another participant stated that:

*“... I was lucky that I passed my MSCE with flying colours grades and upon release I applied and was selected to study engineering at one of the government universities in Malawi. After graduation, I applied for a job in Malawi government where am working now as an engineer”.*

Basically, the current findings are in line with most of the literature on correctional education which argue that the majority of the incarcerated persons who participate in correctional education have higher chances of applying knowledge and skills upon expiry of their sentences. For instance, Farrell (2009), Mackenzie (2020), Salima (2019) and Vandala (2019) found that most ex-offenders who attended correctional education programmes while incarcerated end up applying the knowledge and skills in their respective societies. Additionally, in their study which was conducted in Zambia, Kakupaa and Mulenga, (2021) found that benefits of attending correctional education were visible in the array of products incarcerated persons produced which the society valued. The findings of the current study support the empowerment ideas in Malawi. It is hypothesised that education helps the poor, marginalised and powerless people to effectively change their conditions in changing from criminal behaviour to law abiding citizens (Rappaport, 1981; Costelloe & Warner, 2014). Therefore, correctional education, prepares incarcerated individuals for positive roles in their respective societies upon release.

Although, most discussants narrated that they were applying the knowledge and skills obtained while serving their sentences at Mzimba Maximum Prison, some of them bemoaned that duty bearers including Government do not support them with starter packs to enable them apply their knowledge and skills. They are just left alone to fend for themselves.

One participant stated:

*“Instead of giving us starter packs, they just gave us a piece of paper showing that we have successfully completed our sentences. This is not right. Most of us who had stayed in prison for long periods struggle to put ourselves together and stand on our feet without any assistance.”.*

Furthermore, the study revealed that about 56% of the respondents were self-employed and 28% were found to be employed while 8% were continuing with their studies and 8% did not belong to any of the categories. This finding was supported by qualitative finding, as most of the respondents were engaged in self-employment, which was followed by those who were employed. It was further discovered that most of the respondents who were employed proceeded with their education upon release from lawful custody. One of the participants who was furthering his studies upon release from prison, had this to say:

*“When I was incarcerated at Mzimba Maximum Prison I participated in General Education Development (GED) and I passed my Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) with good grades, and since the Malawi Prison Service does not offer post-secondary education program in its formations, I had to wait to be released from prison so that I could proceed with my studies.”*

The study also revealed that attending post-secondary education increases ex-offenders’ employability chances. The finding is well-matched with findings on studies about correctional education done elsewhere. Freyberg, 2009; Mackenzie, 2020; Torre and Fine, 2006 found that ex-offenders with higher level of education have greater chances of being employed. Further, Duwe and Clark (2014), and Keena and Simmons (2014) argue that post-secondary education has the greatest effect on post-release employment.

Although, the study found that post-secondary education increases the chances of being employed, Malawi Prisons Service does not offer post-secondary education to its incarcerated individuals. Thus, in order to increase the employability of offenders upon their release from prison, it is suggested that the Malawi Prisons Service should introduce, in all its formations, post-secondary education. Literature has it that post-secondary education programmes are offered to incarcerated persons in some African countries, such as South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda (Kajawo & Johnson, 2023).

In order to understand the nexus between criminal record and ex-offenders’ employability, participants were asked if criminal record affects employability. Quantitative results revealed that an ex-offender’s criminal record negatively correlated with his or her employability. This finding was reinforced by qualitative results. Most discussants narrated that employers hardly ask if one was arrested or imprisoned. According to them, most employers were interested in one’s qualifications and experience. One discussant said that;

*“I am employed by the Government of Malawi under Ministry of Education as a primary school teacher. Upon completion of my studies at Teacher Training College (TTC), I was recruited and posted to the school I am teaching now. No any criminal vetting was done on me”.*

This view was even shared by most employers, as they narrated that during recruitment process most of them do not ask about the job seekers’ criminal record. They are only interested in the job seekers’ credentials and related work experience. In Mzimba, most employers including the Government do not discriminate against someone who has a criminal record. However, in some instances and depending with the nature of the work applied for an ex-offender would not be employed. . This study argues that criminal record does not necessarily affect the employability of ex-offenders. This finding is congruent to findings of some studies. To illustrate this point, Formon et al. (2018), Flatt and Jacobs (2018) and Jung (2014) argue that a criminal record does not hinder ex-offenders’ employability provided they are qualified and experienced for the post. On the contrary, Duwe and Clark (2013), Kenemore Roldan's (2005) argues that employers are often unwilling to hire people with criminal records.

The implication of this finding is that incarcerated individuals can be motivated to participate and complete correctional education programmes with the aim of being employed either by the Government or corporate world upon release from lawful custody. In Mzimba, most employers do not discriminate against individuals who have a criminal record.

### ***Ex-offenders’ perception of correctional education***

The general perception of all respondents in this study was that correctional education programmes were perceived to be positive. The mean (*M*) ratings on how ex-offenders perceived correctional education are presented in Table 3. All the mean ratings were found to be positive. The highest rating is on positive contribution to society ( $M = 4.04, SD = 1.098$ ) and the lowest is on improving economic status with ( $M = 3.55, SD = 1.259$ ).

**Table 3: Ex- offenders' perception of correctional education (n=49)**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Successful re-integrate into community	3.88	1.092
Improve social skills	3.92	1.134
Improve economic status	3.55	1.259
Improve behaviour	3.78	1.373
Positive contribution to society	4.04	1.098

**Notes:** Scale values range from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”); the higher the mean score the higher the perception; and the lower the mean score, the lower the perception associated with correctional education. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

**Source:** Research findings (2023)

The findings were supported by qualitative findings. The participants unanimously agreed that correctional education helps in successful re-integration, improves social skills, improves economic status, and improves behaviour and positive contribution to the society. The discussants indicated that they were able to associate positively with their colleagues. They were not only involved in income generating activities but also in development works. One ex-offender at Manyamula had this to say:

*“Prison life taught me a lot; I now believe that we need to take our challenges as a stepping stone towards achieving our goals. At first, it was very hard for me to accept that I have been convicted, but with the passage of time, I accepted my fate. In prison, I participated in correctional education programmes, and I graduated as a pastor. When my sentence expired, the organisation that introduced the programme I attended in prison employed me as a mentor and, we mostly visit different communities to preach the Gospel. I’m now a changed person. I’m able to feed my family and as a role model, I offer advice to different people.”..*

This sentiment was supported by most discussants as they said that correctional education really changed their behaviours and they were not planning to go back to their former selves because they now believed that acquiring needs in anti-social manner was not good. One participant stated:

*“Before going to prison, I was getting my needs through anti-social ways, but now I am happy to say that I am able to acquire my basic needs in a pro-social manner.”*

Even employers indicated that the ex-offenders they had employed were behaving well and could be trusted. One of the employers who participated in the study had this to say:

*“At first, I was not comfortable to employ an ex-offender, but when I saw his papers and the way he responded to interview questions I thought it wise to give him a chance, I then employed him. Upon engaging him, I had to follow his steps but days passed to weeks and weeks to months without finding any faults with him. To cut the story short, he is now one of my best employees”.*

Thus, it is the present study's finding that correctional education provided incarcerated persons with knowledge and skills for successful re-integration into the society, improved social skills, improved economic status, improved behaviour and positive contribution to their respective societies. This supports the empowerment theory. Rappaport (1981, 1987) argues that education facilitates the acquisition of resources to free self-correcting capacities, thus contributing to empowerment. Further, Erikson (2018) opines that involvement in empowering activities lead incarcerated persons to experiment with positive roles rather than negative behaviours. Thus, correctional education helps ex-offenders to gain control over their lives and live a crime-free life.

On the other hand, previous studies concur with the current study's findings regarding the ex-offender's perception of correctional education programmes for example, Kajawo and Johnson (2023), Keena and Simmons (2014), O'Reilly (2014), Salaam (2013) and Vandala (2019) who argues that correctional education has a positive outcome on ex-offenders by enhancing employment skills, reviving humanity, improving cognitive skills, promoting growth and transforming offenders into law-abiding citizens. In addition to that, Mackenzie (2020) found that participating in correctional education improves economic status of the offenders upon their release, by making them employable, and venture into viable businesses. Furthermore, Salima (2019) in Malawi found that correctional education has a positive impact on the lives of offenders upon release from prison as they were able, for example, to make chairs, window frames, welding materials and clothes and sold to people. This shows that correctional education is vital for ex-offenders' successful reintegration into mainstream societies.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has analysed the transformative outcome of correctional education programmes on ex-offenders in Mzimba, Malawi using the empowerment theory. The study concluded that incarcerated individuals who attend correctional education while incarcerated apply the knowledge and skills upon expiry of their sentences. As the majority of the ex-offenders were found to be applying their knowledge and skills in the following categories; self-employed, employed and others were proceeding with their education. Although, the study found that most ex-offenders were applying the knowledge and skills, it was also revealed that there is a need to offer post-secondary education programs to incarcerated individuals in the country. This could enable them to reorient their branded personalities from ex-offenders toward positive social role for instance, college graduate, employee and productive member of the community. Thus, providing them with a sense of empowerment that helps to neutralize the negative effects of incarceration that often result from a criminal conviction. The study further concluded that correctional education is being perceived by ex-offenders as beneficial for their successful reintegration, improved economic status, improved behaviour and positive contribution to society. However, the current study's findings may not be generalized, but; could provide practical correctional education policy guidelines and program design.

Consequently, this study recommends that the Malawi prisons service should partner with other stakeholders for instance, higher learning institutions, technical entrepreneurial and vocational education and training authority, policy makers, civil societies, service users and their families in designing and implementing correctional education programmes. For instance, signing a memorandum of understanding with the higher learning institutions to establish post-secondary education programmes in prisons formation. The programme could either be e-learning or Open Distance Learning (ODL). This could help incarcerated individuals to be competitive upon their release from prison, since the study argues that post secondary education certificate increases employment and business establishment odds. Furthermore, partnering with policy makers may assist those in capacity of making policies to consider distribution of enough resources and funds in support of correctional education programmes in Malawi prisons. To this far end, this study recommends that the Malawi Prisons Service should upgrade its financial support allotted to correctional education by petitioning the Ministry of Finance through the Treasury.

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