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# An Offender's Perspective of Correctional Education Programs in a Southeastern State

Boderick Bennett  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2015

Abstract

An Offender's Perspective of Correctional Education Programs in a Southeastern State

by

Boderick M. Bennett

MA, University of the Rockies, 2011

BS, South University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

April 2015

## Abstract

Many offenders are incarcerated in U.S prisons with the intent of rehabilitation; however, a majority of these offenders will be released with limited options for employment. Recidivism has been linked to unemployment. The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the lived experiences of 20 offenders involved in correctional education programs while incarcerated to explore their correctional education experience within the context of postincarceration employment. The theoretical foundation of this study was based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Narrative data were elicited pertaining to offenders' perceptions of past education experience, correctional education experience, and their perceived impact of the experience on their future employment. Data were analyzed using inductive coding procedures to categorize the offenders' perceptions of correctional education. According to study findings, offenders' participation in and completion of correctional education programs while incarcerated provided the necessary support for them to successfully reenter society; program participation aided offenders to bridge the gap between release and securing employment by providing the necessary skills to compete for employment. This study contributes to social change by informing correctional education administrators, faculty, and staff of the viability of correctional education programs offered to offenders.

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## Dedication

To my children, Saniya and Derick. I know you are too young to understand what this milestone means, but I trust that in time you will. I love you both.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the many people who have had an impact on my life through this journey. First, my wife, Sheenia, for your encouragement and belief in me. I truly couldn't have done this without you. Go Team Bennett! To my friends that made sure I stayed on track: Charles, John and Dave. With a grateful heart I'd like to thank my dissertation chair and mentor, Dr. Tina Jaeckle. Without your continuous support and motivation I wouldn't have made it. To the rest of my committee Dr. Barbara Benoliel and Dr. Scott Hershberger, thanks for hanging in there with me. Most importantly, I give thanks to God, without Him nothing is possible.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to Redcross et al. (2010), in 2010, there were over 2 million offenders in U.S. prisons and jails. Various explanations exist as to why the incarceration rate is so high. Canaan, Draine, Frazier, and Sinha (2008) argued that the policymakers' revisions to policies to include truth in sentencing and the "get tough on crime" approach contributed to the prison population growth. Moore and Elkavich (2008) argued that the "war on drugs" has led to the increase in the number of people who are incarcerated. In contrast, Pettit and Lyons (2009) claimed that mandatory parole revocations caused the increase in growth. Although various explanations exist for the high rate of incarceration in the United States, exoffenders will face challenges of securing employment upon release (Bloom, 2006, 2009; Redcross, Bloom, Azurdia, Zweig, & Pindus, 2009; Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004).

### **Background**

The Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA, 2011) marked the most substantial changes to North Carolina (NC) law since structured sentencing enactment in 1994 (Markham, 2011). This legislation impacted the prison system, in particular, misdemeanor offenders who serve jail time. Under the JRA, misdemeanor offenders, serving a sentence longer than 181 days, serve time in a facility operated by the NC Department of Public Safety-Adult Correction (DPS). A misdemeanant with a sentence of less than 180 days will be housed in a county jail operated under the new Statewide Misdemeanant Confinement Program administered by the NC Sheriff's Association (Markham, 2011).

County jails lack correctional education programs available to inmates serving time (Markham, 2011). While in county jail, offenders' access to rehabilitation programs such as substance abuse, anger management, character education, parenting classes, general education diploma (GED) programs, and various other adult learning re-entry and rehabilitative courses are limited (Markham, 2011). Hall and Killacky (2008) and Lahm (2009) argued that depriving this population of these programs does not equip the offender with the necessary rehabilitative tools to be successful upon release from prison. The Bureau of Justice Statistics Report (as cited in Motivans, 2011) indicated that drug rehabilitation programs are offered in 40% of jails in the United States. Of the more than 2 million offenders incarcerated, fewer than 173,000 receive treatment (as cited in Motivans, 2011). Considering that 75% of offenders have substance abuse issues (as cited in Motivans, 2011), the programs in place do not provide adequate services to those in need.

According to Solomon et al. (2004), an exoffender is unemployable because of the extended periods of incarceration which reduces access to programs that would be beneficial to their postincarceration transition. In addition, a majority of exoffenders get released into communities with high poverty and unemployment rates (Solomon et al., 2004). The title exoffender in itself decreases the possibilities of employment (Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2010). Insufficient education and training compounds the situation and renders exoffenders unemployable. Continued unemployment is linked to an increased rate of recidivism (Bierens & Carvalho, 2011; Pettit & Lyons, 2009; Thompson & Cummings, 2010).

Gottschalk (2011) discussed the need for the U.S. criminal justice system to have a more positive impact on recidivism. With the increase in incarceration from approximately 150,000 offenders in 1970, policy makers and prison officials should pay more attention to decreasing recidivism (Gottschalk, 2011). The increased prison population is impacted by social inequalities, such as race and socioeconomic status (Gottschalk, 2011). The increase in prison population affects the cost of housing offenders, which increases budgets (Gottschalk, 2011). Gottschalk concluded there will be considerable budget cuts with the reduction of incarceration directly related to the increase in programs offered to offenders to assist in their rehabilitation.

Lahm (2009) concluded that offenders who participated in programs had fewer rule violations during their incarceration, resulting in less time spent behind bars. An increase in program participation led to a decrease in the likelihood of recidivism (Lahm, 2009). Rossman (2003) used a qualitative research method to examine the impact of improving relationships between exoffenders, their families, and the community to examine the effects on recidivism. Rossman established an association between recidivism and the relationship the exoffender has with his or her family and the community. The results of the study may be used as an example of the role that the community has on recidivism, in particular, employment opportunities. In addition, the lessons gleaned from the exoffender's experiences may provide direction to policies guiding the implementation of correctional education programs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As of August 2014, approximately 37,000 offenders remained incarcerated in the NC Department of Public Safety (DPS; North Carolina Department of Corrections, 2011; North Carolina Department of Public Safety, 2014). Despite the educational and vocational programs offered by DPS aimed at preparing inmates to be productive citizens (Hall & Killacky, 2008; Lahm, 2009), recidivism remains at 54% (NCDC, 2011). The U.S. Department of Justice-Bureau of Justice Statistics indicated that roughly 52% or 4,500 of offenders released from prison recidivate within 3 years (as cited in Motivans, 2011).

A barrier linked to reincarceration is unemployment (Gottschalk, 2011). According to Bierens and Carvalho (2011) and Gottschalk (2011), an unemployed exoffender is more likely to return to prison. The study has a foundation in the 1994 decision to withdraw Pell Grants from offenders incarcerated (Ubah, 2004). Correctional education programs receive limited funding; therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the programs the offenders perceive to be most valuable postincarceration. It is imperative to consider how to best spend funds regarding correctional education programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain the perspective of offenders regarding correctional education programs. I focused on programs that include earning a GED, vocational training, and correctional counseling. By focusing on the DPS, insight pertaining to what programs offered and the dynamics of the department's influence were



gained. Multiple perspectives of correctional education programs are provided throughout the study which aid in providing insight on what programs offenders believe aided in their success upon release. Through a qualitative inquiry of offenders, a determination was made regarding which correctional education programs offenders perceive as being effective in gaining employment, which programs they feel should be offered, and what academic and job skills they had prior to incarceration. A comparison of program preferences and offerings aided in gaining insight into the overarching research question that formed the basis of this study.

A wealth of research exists from the perspectives of experts in the field. Numerous studies were conducted to determine the impact of correctional education on the reduction of recidivism. However, limited research exists on the offender's perspective of correctional education programs (Tolbert, Bugarian, Cataldi, & Tauschek, 2004). The offender perspective provides insight regarding what aspects of correctional education offenders perceive as beneficial upon release from prison. The offender perception provided a perspective into why some offenders participate in correctional education programs while others do not, which is needed to implement programs that align with the needs of the population.

### **Research Question**

#### **Main Research Question**

RQ: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs completed within the past 3 years (2011-2014)?

**Subquestion**

SQ: What are the exoffender's perception of the impact of correctional education programs on postrelease employment?

**Theoretical Framework**

According to Bandura (1973), caregivers serve as the initial role models in a child's life. Children learn behavior from observing, imitating, and copying the caregiver's response to various situations (Ormond, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Caregivers display to children that they are social beings and prepare them to exist in a world outside of the home (Vygotsky, 1978). As the child has more interactions with the world outside the home, their behavior and understanding of the outside world increases (Bandura, 1973). In most situations, the initial caregivers are a mother and father who teach their children how to behave through modeling (Bandura, 1973).

Children also learn behavior from outside sources, such as extended family, friends, and teachers. Bandura (1973) argued that radio and television personalities have an influence on children's social behavior. These outside sources have an impact on the child's thinking and behavior as they grow and develop (Bandura, 1973). The thoughts and ideas of what is right and wrong and acceptable and not acceptable are confirmed at this time (Bandura, 1973). Children internalize ideas about society and other entities such as school as well (Bandura, 1973).

Bandura's (2000) self-efficacy theory is an extension of the social learning theory. The self-efficacy theory is used to describe a person's ability to overcome life's obstacles (Bandura, 2000). By persevering in difficult times, children overcome daily obstacles

(Bandura, 1973; 2000). Being self-efficient is an important part of reaching personal goals, which children accomplish with encouragement and support provided by caregivers (Bandura, 2000). An offender, for example, may reach self-efficiency through contact with others who have overcome obstacles. In contrast, the reduction in self-efficiency occurs when the offender surrounds him or herself with people who fail (Bandura, 2000).

The social learning theory and self-efficacy theory build upon one another. Incarcerated offenders primarily interact with other offenders. Many of these offenders have a bleak outlook on life based on their current situations. Correctional education programs provide an opportunity for offenders to come into contact with positive individuals while learning skills that are beneficial in the future (Jensen & Reed, 2006). The skills learned in the correctional education programs aid offenders in becoming self-efficient upon release by providing them with tangible skills and knowledge that is used to support themselves upon release from prison (Jensen & Reed, 2006).

Erikson (1968) introduced the theory of eight stages of human development. Erikson believed that a person's biological, environmental, and cultural influences affect individual behavior (Erikson, 1968). Cultural influences play a significant role in life (Erikson, 1968). The impacts of cultural and social norms are emphasized by the sociocultural perspective of those with an impact on the individual (Erikson, 1968). Proponents of the theory argued that children learn behavior through their interactions with others (Bandura, 1973; Erikson, 1968; Walker, Pressick-Kilborn, Arnold & Sainsbury, 2004). An individual's environment, biological, and cultural influences impact

his or her behavior, more commonly referred to as nature vs. nurture (Bandura, 1973; Erikson, 1968; Ormond, 1999). This theory is similar to the social learning theory, which states that behavior is learned through watching others (Bandura, 1973). The link between these theories and this study is that past experiences and resiliency during difficult times may have an impact on motivation, participation, and success in correctional education programs. Chapter 2 includes further discussion regarding these possible links between the theories and the decision to participate in correctional education programs.

### **Nature of the Study**

The primary concept examined in this case study was the lived experiences of the participants. Each participant formed a case, where each case was based on everything about the individual, including test scores, essays, and previous educational experience. The participants shared the connection of participating in correctional education programs in a 3-year time frame (2011-2014). According to Yin (2009), the use of multiple cases in a single case study increases credibility and reduces skepticism of the findings. It was assumed that the lessons learned from the particular cases would be informative of the experiences of the average offender (Yin, 2009).

The perceptions and correctional education experiences of the participants who participated in correctional education programs at least 3 years prior to the study was explored. Inquiry regarding the experiences of participants in correctional education programs, as well as the impact on the programs on employment postrelease, was addressed. Neither concept could be manipulated as both were relevant to the

phenomenon of study. In purposeful sampling, the goal is to find individuals or cases that provide insight into the specific situation under study, regardless of the general population (Yin, 2009). For this study, the use of a case study was appropriate because of the contemporary issue of recidivism that cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2009).

To gather the perceptions of the offenders' correctional education experiences, interviews served as the chosen method of data collection. In conjunction with the interviews, test scores, and essays written by the participant while they participated in the correctional education programs, the outcomes of the education classes, training outcomes, and teachers' comments were collected.

Interviews with correctional education professionals were conducted as supporting documentation. An interview is the administration of questions orally to a member of the sample (Yin, 2009). Interviews are the best method of data collection when gathering information that cannot be collected using multiple choice items, information of a personal nature, and of great length (Yin, 2009). The offenders' personal experiences was the study's focus, and the interview was the best approach to capture the responses of the participants. To portray the offender perception of correctional education, according to Yin (2009), their words have to be a key part of the data.

I conducted the research alone, solely responsible for data analysis. The participants were interviewed using a semistructured interview guide. Data analysis includes reducing the data by the identification and coding of important statements to (a) create themes, (b) make comparisons, and (c) contextualize the literature (Creswell, 2011). Chapter 3 includes further detail regarding gathering and analyzing data.

The purpose of this qualitative case study using purposeful sampling was to explore the offenders' perspectives of correctional education programs offered within the DPS to seek a better understanding of their perceived effectiveness. The offender's perceived impact of correctional education gauges effectiveness. In purposeful sampling, the goal is to find individuals or cases that provide insight into the specific situation under study, regardless of the general population (Yin, 2009).

The explorative analysis of a case study suited the needs for this study. A case study affords the researcher the opportunity to identify and understand the different dimensions of the phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Leonard-Barton, 1990; Yin, 2009). This is the preferred method when a blurred boundary exists between the context and the phenomenon (Van Raak & Paulus, 2001; Yin, 2009). Finally, the case study approach is preferred when no prior research exists that allows conducting more broad-based data collection and analysis (Bazzoli, Harmata, & Chan, 1998).

### **Definition of Terms**

Within the criminal justice and education systems there are many terms with similar meanings. The terms may have slightly different meaning based on the state or context. Simple definitions are provided for the following common terms:

*Incarceration:* Confinement to a penal institution while awaiting trial for an offense or as punishment for an offense (Hall, 2006).

*Offender:* A person sentenced to time served for the commission of a crime (West, 2011).

*Prisoner:* An individual sentenced to a penitentiary/prison/correctional institution as punishment for the commission of a crime (West, 2011).

*Recidivism:* Return to a penal institution as a result of commission of a related or new criminal offense (West, 2011).

*Revocation:* Return to a penal institution as a result of violation of conditions of probation or parole (Hall, 2006).

*Correctional educator, correctional education employee:* An individual who teaches in a prison setting (West, 2011).

*Correctional education:* Educational classes and/or training within the penal institution (West, 2011).

*Vocational education:* Programs focused on training adults to perform a specific task in preparation for performing that task on a job site (West, 2011).

*Literacy:* The ability to read and write to function in society (West, 2011).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made about the participants of this research study: (a) the participants cooperated fully throughout the study, (b) if at any time the participants no longer wish to participate in the interview, they will inform me, and (c) all participants possessed literacy (able to read, write, and speak in English) and had the mental capacity to understand and answer the interview questions.

### **Delimitations**

The purpose of this study was not to measure the effectiveness of correctional education, nor to represent the experiences of all offenders who participated in

correctional education programs. Only the experiences of the participants was represented. This study did not include individuals housed outside of transitional homes, individuals without access to telephone or e-mail, and individuals who did not respond to the request for participants

### **Limitations**

According to Patton (2003), a limitation is an aspect of the study that the researcher has no control over, but has a negative impact on the study. Consequently, several limitations existed in this study that were worthy of mention. The number of participants limited the study. However, the methodology used does not call for a large sample (Patton, 2003). The goal of the research was not to generalize the findings of the sample population to that of a larger population of exoffenders who participated in correctional education programs. As Patton (2003) suggested, no rule exists for sample size when using qualitative research. Time constraints limited the time I was able to spend with each participant. The time constraints were due to the busy work and school schedule of the participants. A final limitation was employer ignorance regarding offender rehabilitation and reluctance to hire exoffenders.

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the research was to examine the lived experiences of exoffenders and their unheard perspective regarding correctional education programs. This study aids in filling the gap in the literature in reference to the offender perspective of correctional education programs. In this study, I documented exoffender perceived impact of the correctional education programs regarding employment and recidivism. The research will



be beneficial in determining which aspects of correctional education programs offenders perceive as beneficial regarding reintegration into the community and gaining suitable employment. The research may inform new programs designed to assist offenders during rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

This research impacts social change by informing human services' delivery of some of the correctional education needs of offenders. The research draws attention to areas of correctional education in need of reevaluation. In addition, public insight into the correctional environment, which may enhance society's views regarding the rehabilitation of offenders, will be impacted. This information is of value to administrators and program directors in the criminal justice field to aid in highlighting programs more aligned with the needs of the population.

### **Summary**

Correctional education has a long history of rehabilitating offenders in some way. The elimination of the availability of Pell Grants to incarcerated offenders reduced the resources available for the creation, implementation, and maintenance of correctional education programs. Although scholars have demonstrated the benefit of correctional education on the reduction of recidivism (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil, Drapkin, MacKenzie & Hickman, 2000; Gehring, 1997; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Ward, 2009), funding is futile (Hall & Killacky, 2008). The offender perspective, one not well documented, was the focus of this study.

Included in Chapter 2 is a review of the literature selected in support of the conceptual framework and methodology. The review includes a discussion of correctional education and gaps in the research to justify the need for this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of offenders and their unheard perspective(s) regarding their participation in correctional education programs during their incarceration. The goal of the review of literature is to focus on the social learning, self-efficacy, and eight stages of human development theoretical perspectives, all of which contribute to the conceptual framework of the study. The review also includes research on the correctional education programs offered while incarcerated. The articles reviewed included selection for (a) exploration of the offender's perspective of correctional education, (b) case studies on correctional education provider's perspectives and experiences in correctional education settings, and (c) the offender's perspective of education in general.

The researchers who explored correctional education are not current or specific to any particular region. The significance of the research is that the findings are the same across the board regardless of locale (Klein, Tolbert, Bugarian, Cataldi, &Tauschek, 2004). Some articles are qualitative case studies from the perspective of correctional education providers. This approach is significant because it is comparative with the current study. In addition, reviews of quantitative studies on correctional education have been conducted. These studies were selected because of the examination of the same phenomenon, using a different methodology, and yielding similar results.

The literature reviewed in this chapter includes the following categories: (a) the theoretical framework, (b) offender's perspective of correctional education programs, and (c) the offender's perspective of education in general. The concluding summary of the

chapter includes the themes that emerged as a result of the theoretical analysis and review of the literature. A gap in the current research on the offender's perspective of correctional education are also included.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The initial search of the literature was limited to the previous 5 year period (2009-2014). The search was extended to beyond 5 years because of the limited amount of resources available to support the research questions. These articles selected are seminal which establishes a foundation and credibility. Terms guiding the search are as follow: *academic achievement, adjustment to release, confinement, correctional education, correctional education employees, correctional employees, correctional effectiveness, offender, counseling in prison, counseling rehabilitation, mental health treatment in prison, offender perspective, post release programs, prison rehabilitation, prison release, prison structure, reentry, reentry programs, rehabilitation, programs, social reintegration, substance abuse employees in prison, and substance abuse treatment in prison.*

The search for related articles led to the inclusion of a variety of books and journals. References for the literature review were gleaned from sources accessed online through EBSCO primarily. In addition, Google Scholar and public libraries were used as sources. The articles selected came from a variety of sources all with a focus on social issues. Each piece provided significant insight into the complexity of correctional education and the offenders that participate in the programs. Another reason the articles were included in the selection was because of their use of qualitative research methods

using the case study design. The quantitative studies used are relevant to provide comparison. The most relevant studies used the case study design because of the use of the approach in this study to gain insight of the offender's perspective of correctional education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bandura (1973) proposed that caregivers are the initial role models in a child's life. Children learn behavior from observing, imitating, and copying the caregiver's response to various situations (Arnold & Sainsbury, 2004; Ormond, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Caregivers display to children that they are social beings capable of existing in a world outside of the home. This is when a child's behavior and understanding of the outside world increases (Bandura, 1973). In most situations, the initial caregivers are a mother and father who teach their children how to behave through modeling (Bandura, 1973). Children later learn behavior from outside sources such as extended family, friends and teachers (Hanser, 2010).

How to behave in a school environment, in addition to social settings, is influenced by outside sources compounded by social media. Radio and television personalities may even have an influence on children's social behavior (Bandura, 1973). This relates to this study because of the impact prior experiences may have on the offender's decision to participate in correctional education programs. Mageehon (2003) showed that offenders with good experiences in school prior to incarceration are more apt to participate and complete correctional education programs while incarcerated. This links the social learning theory to the self-efficacy and eight stages of human

development theories regarding the impact of the relationship between prior experiences, current experiences, and external factors related to the individual.

The self-efficacy theory is an extension of the social learning theory in that Bandura (2000) described as a person's ability to overcome life's obstacles. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) proposed that self-efficacy was a necessary step in the transition from middle to high school. Adolescents who lack confidence socially and academically are at an increased risk of dropping out (Bandura et al., 1996). Relating this outcome to the correctional education setting, the majority of offenders enter the system lacking basic literacy and job skills (Hall & Killacky, 2008). Offenders who lack self-efficacy are at an increased risk of not completing correctional education programs, thus increasing the likelihood of recidivism (Bandura et al., 1996).

Being self-efficient is an important part of reaching personal goals, which children accomplish with encouragement and support provided by caregivers (Bandura et al., 1996). An offender for example, may reach self-efficacy through contact with others who have overcome obstacles, such as prison, or volunteers who are exoffenders and return to share their stories. By contrast, self-efficiency may be reduced when surrounded by people who also fail (Bandura, 2000). Individuals with high self-efficacy have a deeper commitment to achieving academic goals and success (Bandura et al., 1996). This commitment is displayed through the individual seeking assistance from others (Bandura et al, 1996). Individuals with low self-efficacy lack confidence in their abilities thus associate with others who perform poorly (Bandura et al., 1996).

In addition, these individuals have poor social qualities, low motivation, and engage in behaviors destructive to academic success (Bandura et al., 1996). According to Carson and Sobel (2012), roughly 68% of offenders incarcerated did not complete high school. This number equates to over half of the offender population being in need of correctional education programming. Offenders who did not have positive experiences prior to their incarceration may lack the motivation to complete correctional education programs (Mageehon, 2003). The offenders with negative attitudes towards education might impact other offenders who observe and later mimic this behavior, thus impacting the overall correctional education program setting in a prison (Bandura et al., 1996).

Erikson (1968) introduced the eight stages of human development, believing that a person's biological, environmental, and cultural influences had an effect on individual behavior. Vygotsky (1999) stated that the development of a person links to his or her environment. Cultural influences also have a role in life. The impacts of cultural and social norms are emphasized by the sociocultural perspective. Proponents of the theory argued that children learn behavior through their interactions with others (Walker et al., 2004). The eight stages of human development theory is similar to the social learning theory, which proposes that behavior is learned through watching others and the self-efficiency theory, which proposes that an individual's environment, as well as biological and cultural influences, impact behavior (Bandura, 1973; Erikson, 1968; Ormond, 1999). The eight stages of human development theory applies to the prison setting because behavior is learned (Bandura, 1973). The attitude of the prison setting is survival, accomplished by fitting into the environment. With majority of the offender population

lacking basic education (Carson & Sobel, 2012), the desire to complete correctional education programs may not draw the support of their peers.

The social learning and self-efficacy theorists placed emphasis on the importance of the caregiver role in the development of an individual that is confident, balanced, and positive (Bandura, 1973; Bandura et al., 1996). The theories focus on caregivers providing a model of appropriate behavior and support (Bandura, 1973; Bandura et al., 1996). The theoretical foundation of the study included the assumptions that offender's lacked an appropriate model to learn behavior, which plays a role in their failure to complete high school and commit delinquent behaviors resulting in prison sentences.

The relationships of the theories is essential to an offender's success in the correctional education setting. One of the primary causes of delinquent behavior is subpar family relationships (Sullivan & Wilson, 1995). Without parental influences, other offenders, teachers, counselors, chaplains, and volunteers take on the role of outside sources. All of these outside sources act as external influences that aid in the increase of self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1996). Offenders learn behavior from watching other offenders. If offenders surround themselves with positive people, the offender will learn positive behavior (Bandura et al., 1996). Correctional education staff play a role in effectively rehabilitating offenders as a result of this theory. Positive attitude and behavior of the offender is a result of the staff members having the most interaction with offenders, while in the programs. Therefore, the external sources are important for offender participation and success in correctional education programs.



## Historical Overview

Correctional education is an intricate aspect of the rehabilitative efforts of the correctional system. According to Nally, Lockwood, Knutson, and Ho (2012), since the 1980s, the rate of incarceration increased, where offenders are apt to be uneducated and under employed prior to being admitted into prison. Since 1994, the demand for correctional education programs increased, while funding for such programs decreased (Nally et al., 2012). During the recent recession period that began in 2008, many states reduced correctional education budgets, in addition to eliminating programs in an attempt to resolve budget deficits (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamel, Solomon, & Lindahl, 2009; Nally et al., 2012). While the budget for prison education is small in comparison to other items in the overall budget, the perception of offenders receiving a free education is negative (Nally et al., 2012). The negative perception led to the 1994 legislation where Congress passed the amendment to exclude offenders from receiving U.S. federal funding (i.e., Pell Grants) for postsecondary education programs offered at correctional facilities (Nally et al., 2012). According to Ubah (2004), this result impacted almost all correctional education programs across the United States adversely, with many eliminating correctional programs.

Because of the influx of uneducated and undereducated offenders, correctional education became deeply embedded in the correctional system in America (Nally et al., 2012). Vacca (2004) stated that a notable number of exoffenders remain unemployed because of the lack of education and skills required to meet job demands. According to

the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (as cited in Carson & Sobel, 2012), approximately 68% of offenders incarcerated did not complete high school.

Stevens and Ward (1997) conducted a study of 60 exoffenders examining the effect of correctional education on the reduction of recidivism in North Carolina. One of the conclusions of the study is that none of the exoffenders earning a 4-year degree recidivated at the 3 year post-release mark. In addition, only five of the exoffenders who received an Associate's degree recidivated (Stevens & Ward, 1997). This data compares to statistics of the general population collected across the state during the same period of time (Stevens & Ward, 1997). Of the general population, 40% recidivated within the same 3 year period (Stevens & Ward, 1997). A comparison of other correctional institutions across the country yielded similar results (Stevens & Ward, 1997).

Many studies offer results regarding the benefit of correctional education programs in regarding the reduction of recidivism and decrease of the cost of housing offenders (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil, Drapkin, MacKenzie & Hickman, 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003; Taylor, 1992; Vacca, 2004; Ward, 2009). The researchers generally concluded recidivism diminishes through correctional education in addition to decreasing the cost of incarceration. The recidivism rate decreases in instances when the offenders achieved higher education while incarcerated (Nally et al., 2012).

### **Correctional Education and Reintegration**

According to Pryor and Thompkins (2013), an imperative component of the successful reintegration of exoffenders is education. A measurement of successful reintegration regarding correctional education, is its ability to produce a better citizen (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). There is a perceived relationship between (a) correctional education, (b) an increase in public safety perception, (c) decreased recidivism rates and (d) employment opportunities of exoffenders (Chappell, 2004; Pryor & Thompkins, 2013; Steurer & Smith, 2003).

The 1970s are referred to as the “Golden Age” of correctional education (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). During this Golden Age, correctional education programs were in wide use. During the 1980s, a shift took place in the public’s perception of correctional education programs, which led to a decrease in support from policymakers, resulting in the termination of many programs (Ubah, 2004). The elimination of Pell Grants as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was the most drastic change (Ubah, 2004). The elimination of Pell Grant funds to offenders led to a decrease in participation in correctional education programs by 44% (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). The decline in correctional education programs and their ability to aid in successful reintegration was directly impacted by the elimination of Pell Grants (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). The reduction in correctional education programs troubling when taken into consideration a large number of offenders entering the prison system are uneducated or undereducated (Carson & Sobel, 2012; Pryor & Thompkins, 2013).

Another barrier to overcome while incarcerated and pursuing correctional education is transfers. While incarcerated, an offenders may be transferred at any time without notice (Brazzel et al., 2009). These transfers disrupt the offender's ability to complete programs. Often, a program offered at one institution may not be offered at the next (Brazzel et al., 2009). The non-availability of a program means that credits are non-transferrable and the offender's progress halts upon transfer. According to Brazzell et al. (2009), even though an offender may be participating in correctional education programs, because of transfers, they are not completing the programs. The transfers occur because the needs of the institution and correctional system as a whole, having precedence over the needs of the correctional education program and offender (Brazzell et al., 2009).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned, many offenders do not complete correctional education programs at the time of release (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Failure to complete a program means exoffenders must participate in education programs outside of prison to complete their education. Given correctional education's ability to aid in the reduction of recidivism, exoffenders should have the opportunity to continue their education once released (Brazzel et al., 2009); however, there are a many barriers aside from financial that may prohibit an exoffenders ability to complete their education (Oliver, 2010). Many exoffenders do not have the financial resources to pursue education outside of prison (Pryor & Thompkins, 213). Some exoffenders may have others obstacles to overcome based on the conditions of their probation or parole, which may prevent them from continuing their education upon release (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008).

In 2010, the majority of the reentry population consisted of low level drug offenders (Redcross et al., 2010). However, there are restriction on U.S. federal loans being distributed to drug offenders (Nally et al., 2012). Another barrier to reentry are conditions or probation or parole. Mandated conditions may often inadvertently prohibit an exoffender from continuing their education (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013).

Additional barriers include the stigma associated with being an exoffender and the correctional education certifications inability to transfer into jobs in society. Often certificates or documents noting educational achievements brandish signs of its origins (ie: DOC or the name of the institution), these identifiers may damage job opportunities (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Exoffenders may be reluctant or hesitant in verifying education or training, out of fear of the label attached to being an exoffender (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). The value of correctional education may only be realized through its ability to materialize into job opportunities (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). Regardless of the level of education, an exoffender is at risk of recidivating if he or she cannot obtain employment using acquired education and skills (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013).

Once released, many exoffenders cannot build upon the correctional education foundation (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). Sometimes exoffenders face many of the same struggles as society members without incarceration in that many exoffenders have families, struggle to support themselves, or lack the means to attend school and survive without working (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). The aforementioned obstacles become unique to exoffenders when compounded with added barriers such as fines, curfews, and prohibitions to aid (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008).

Sometimes barriers may be put in place by individuals appointed to assist exoffenders in their reintegration process. A probation officer, for example, might require an exoffender to find employment, which may deter their education initiative. Mandated employment is not feasible under certain circumstances, impeding the successful reentry for some (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013). Mandates such as fines, curfews, and inconvenient reporting times, may hinder those seeking post release education (Pryor & Thompkins, 2013).

### **Characteristics of the Offender Student**

According to Visher and Travis (2003), most offenders have poor job skills and employment records. Austin and Hardyman (2004) stated that a precursor to criminal activity is the lack of stable employment, complicated further where most offenders lacked stable employment prior to incarceration. The commission of crimes by many offenders were in an attempt to earn money for their family (Visher, Debus-Sherrill & Yahner, 2010). The result of the commission of crime is incarceration.

Substance abuse is another characteristic of offender students. Substance abuse is not the primary focus of this study, but is a precursor to criminal activity and incarceration (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Visher, et al., 2010). Substance abuse distracts a person from work, family obligations, and following the law (Pelissier & Jones, 2006). Relating this behavior to the offender, substance abuse prevents the offender student from making the necessary changes (Hall, 2006). Substance abuse issues, if left untreated prevents offender students from successfully completing correctional education programs (Hall, 2006).

Family, education, employment, and substance abuse history all have a profound impact upon the decisions an offender makes while incarcerated. Whether or not to attend correctional education programs is one of those decisions. The offender's previous experiences serve as a deterrent or impetus for success (Hall, 2006). The key to overcoming past obstacles and success for offenders post incarceration is participation in correctional education programs to include substance abuse treatment (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008; Hall, 2006; Visher, et al., 2010).

### **Motivation to Attend**

At some point during incarceration the offender decides to participate in correctional education programs. These decisions are based on some factor(s). To better understand the correctional education experience, one must also understand what motivates offender students to attend and complete programs (Pelissier & Jones, 2006).

Pelissier and Jones (2006) highlighted the importance of offenders' motivation to participate in correctional educational programs. Being that majority of correctional education programs are voluntary, offenders must have the motivation to want to participate in programs (Pelissier & Jones, 2006). Although substance abuse treatment is the primary focus of Pelissier and Jones' work, the motivation concept applies to correctional education programs.

### **External and Internal Motivation**

Pelissier (2004) identified motivation to change as the offender's willingness to participate in programs. The motivation may be external or internal. External motivation is found outside the offender and may come in the form of incentives such as extra pay,

better work assignments, or early release and good conduct time credits, where an offender's sentence may be reduced through program participation. External motivation may also come from the judge trying the case, prison administration or the parole board. What determines an external motivator is if it is the determining factor in the offender's decision to participate in the correctional education programs (Pelissier, 2004).

Motivation may come in the form of pressure resulting from court-ordered participation or prison administration that requires participation in correctional education programs in return for a reduction in prison sentence. Offender students are provided with an incentive for participation (Hall, 2006). For example, satisfactory participation in correctional education programs in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, can earn an offender student gain time toward the reduction of their sentence (North Carolina Department of Public Safety [NCDPS], 2013).

According to Visser et al. (2010), participation in correctional education programs in some institutions may be mandatory. The required participation may lead to problems, because offenders do not understand the importance or value of participating (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004). Parkinson and Steurer (2004) further stated these offender students most likely have a history of academic difficulty.

Lindner (1994) stated that students may be distraught with challenges faced in the daily activities in the classroom; they may feel failure is related to their lack of intelligence. The perception of impending failure may lead to a student extremely motivated to participate in correctional education programs encountering difficulty adjusting to the academic environment. Offender students may also be discouraged to



participate based on the negative feedback and attitudes of other offenders (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004). Although external motivation may complicate offender participation in correctional education programs, it is not a precursor to failure (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004).

Internal motivation lies within the offender student. Internal motivation occurs when an offender voluntarily accepts treatment and participates in correctional education programs in an attempt to alter future behavior (Hall, 2006; Pelissier, 2004). Pelissier (2004) argued that key to success in drug treatment is internal motivation. Internal motivation may also relate to an offender's decision to participate in correctional education programs. A comparison study conducted by Osberg and Fraley (1993) found offender students were on average, more motivated to participate and be successful in college courses than their traditional counterpart. Some offenders may be motivated to impress family members. Parkinson and Steurer (2004) described prison graduation ceremonies where family members attend as a motivational tool for offenders to complete programs.

According to Edwards-Willey and Chivers (2005) some offender students might receive their motivation from an instructor. Some correctional educators believe a good student is naturally motivated (Lindner, 1994). One could argue offender students with positive educational experiences prior to incarceration may be internally motivated to participate in correctional education programs. Some offender students may simply be motivated to personally improve (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). Edwards-Willey and Chivers (2005) further stated that an offender's motivation to

participate in correctional education may not primarily be based on early release, rather on self-improvement, which leads to post incarceration success.

### **Defining Recidivism**

According to Nally et al. (2012), the effectiveness of correctional education programs is measured by recidivism. However, a universally accepted way to measure if correctional education programs are successful accounting for the offender post-release situation exists (Batiuk, Moke & Rountree, 1997; Fabelo, 2002; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Jancic, 1998; Nuttall et al., 2003; Stevens & Ward, 1997). The opposition to measurement is grounded on the basis of the measurement of recidivism is methodologically inadequate (Cecil et al., 2000; Hull, Forrester, Brown, Jobe & McCullen, 2000; Lewis, 2006). Regardless, recidivism is a highly regarded and accepted outcome measure based on the mandates imposed by state and U.S. federal funding entities (Linton, 2007). Although the effectiveness of correctional education is measured through recidivism, post-release employment may be an indicator of the effectiveness of correctional education programs.

According to Linton (2007) approximately 60% of exoffenders return to prison at least once after release. According to Nuttall et al. (2003) approximately 40% of offenders 21 and under who earned a GED while incarcerated recidivated within 3 years of release, this is in comparison to 54% of exoffenders that did not earn a GED. The results are similar for postsecondary education (Nuttall et al., 2003).

According to Chappell et al. (2004) the higher the education attained while incarcerated, the higher the odds are for reduction in recidivism. Chappell et al. further

stated that correctional education programs are cost effective for society. The researcher's explain the offenders that possessed a minimum of 2 years of college had a recidivism rate of 10% opposed to 60% for those lacking this level of education (Chappell et al., 2004). This review of articles about correctional education indicated a positive relationship between correctional education and a reduction in recidivism (Chappell et al., 2004).

### **Themes and Issues**

The theme and primary issue discussed in the literature displays the possibility of a connection between correctional education program participation and reduced recidivism. Gottschalk (2011), Lahm (2009), and Hall and Killacky (2008) suggested correctional education programs aid in the increase of employment upon release and reduces recidivism. Another emerging conclusion regards the lack of data, which highlights the fact that further analysis is needed to analyze programs and identify viability.

However, the lack of data and the informational gap regarding correctional education is discussed throughout the literature that is available. The articles and reviews researched focused on the history and current status of the need for correctional education program information on the state level. According to Klein, Tolbert, Bugarian, Cataldi and Tauschek (2004) even though correctional education programs offered in almost all state, private, and U.S. federal institutions, a break in communication and a lack of information regarding the overall status of the programs nationwide exists. This lack of information contributes to the impossibility to compare the effectiveness of correctional

education programs with other programs offered at the state and U.S. federal levels (Klein et al., 2004). The lack of data negatively impacts the discipline which continues to be directed by the philosophy of the ever changing leadership and management in the penal system (Klein et al., 2004).

According to Hall and Killacky (2008), the lack of funding for correctional education programs, in conjunction with the condemnations of being an exoffender, contribute to recidivism. This assumption is based on previous studies which assessed the impact of correctional education on recidivism (Nuttall et al., 2003; Slater, 1994-1995). It was argued the more education amassed by the offender while incarcerated, the better the chance of the offender successfully reintegrating into society (Hall & Killacky, 2008). Research conducted by Lahm (2009) concluded offenders that participated in correctional education programs had fewer rule violations during their incarceration. The direct result was less time spent behind bars (Lahm, 2009). Also noted was the increase in program participation led to a decrease in the likelihood of recidivism (Lahm, 2009).

According to Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, and Lindhal (2009) research regarding correctional education and reentry programs is limited. A meta-analysis of research covering a 15 year span conducted by Urban Institute's Justice and Policy Center. The focus was on the correctional education programs, recidivism, post-release employment programs, and postsecondary education (Brazzell et al., 2009). The conclusion of the analysis was that while an increase in discussions regarding reentry, workforce development, health, housing, and public safety exist, there is relatively little discussion on the impact of prison and post-release education on successful reentry

(Brazzell et al., 2009). For individuals incarcerated, education provides a path to better employment, reduction in recidivism, and a better quality of life (Brazzell et al., 2009). Despite the possibility of life altering impact, quality education is not available to most offenders (Brazzell et al. 2009). Brazzell et al. (2009) concluded not enough literature exists to accurately assess correctional education and reentry programs. Owens (2009) stated that access to correctional education programs appears to deter the involvement in criminal activity. Erisman and Contardo (2005) argued that although a correlation exists between increased education and reduced recidivism, no way exists to determine the depth of the relationship.

### **Understanding Correctional Education**

Gottschalk (2011) discussed the need to improve the criminal justice system in addition to programs offered in institutions with the purpose to have a more positive impact on recidivism. It was noted that because of the increase in incarceration, policy makers and prison officials should pay more attention to decreasing recidivism (Gottschalk, 2011). Recidivism increases the overall cost of housing offenders which increases budgets (Gottschalk, 2011). Conclusions included that there will be considerable budget cuts when fewer offenders incarcerated exist, which directly related to the increase in programs offered to offenders to assist in their rehabilitation (Gottschalk, 2011).

Jensen and Reed (2006) and Vacca (2004) concluded that correctional education participants are less likely to recidivate, arguing correctional education intervention reduces recidivism. Wade (2007) reported approximately 63% of offenders incarcerated

had an income of less than \$1000 a month. A correlation exists between a lack of education, a higher rate of exposure to poverty and crime (Jensen & Reed, 2006). Further argument includes that correctional education programs may aid in offenders obtaining suitable employment upon release (Jensen & Reed, 2006).

Correctional education exists in every state in some form; however, there is no monitoring or oversight of the programs, thus contributing to a lack of data pertaining to the efficacy of the programs (Klein et al., 2004). In addition, a lack of communication exists between the states. According to Klein et al. (2004), the data available lacks detail, offering merely counts of offender program participation, types, and numbers of programs offered within a state, and in some instances the certificates, degrees, and credentials earned by offenders (Perrone, 2007).

Further research exploring the impact of correctional education on post release employment is needed. Pryor and Thompkins (2013) recommended empirical tests to establish a relationship of barriers to educational success to include an analysis of post release barriers such as race and substance abuse, and the link to employment to include a closer look at the relationship between correctional education programming and the job upon release. Even more importantly, standardization among correctional education programs to determine effectiveness is needed (Gottschalk, 2011).

### **Forensic Populations and Counseling**

There are several concerns noted that associated with treating sex offenders in correctional settings. These concerns relate to correctional education, because correctional *counseling* is a form of correctional *education* (Farkas & Miller, 2008).

According to Farkas and Miller (2008) and Olver and Wong (2009), the primary concern is that most programs offered in correctional settings require the offender to admit guilt. This requirement may be an issue to many offenders who pled not guilty during their trial (Olver & Wong, 2009). Regardless, mandatory programs exist in 17 states requiring the participation of offenders as part of their sentence, parole, or probation (Farkas & Miller, 2008). Offenders coerced into attending because of the harsh consequences of refusing to attend (Farkas & Miller, 2008). In the event an offender voluntarily drops out of the program consequences may result in privilege denial, visitation limits, good time credits lost, and failure to have security level lowered (Farkas & Miller, 2008).

Another component of counseling based correctional education programs is spirituality. According to Mincey, Maldonado, Lacey, and Thompson (2008), change is an emotional process that requires deep soul searching and thought. Programs that offer spiritual guidance aid in the reduction of anxiety associated with change (Mincey et al., 2008). Spirituality counseling provides an avenue to channel the negative emotions in a positive way.

Miller (2006) conducted research pertaining to the need for interventions for the children of incarcerated parents. Even though programs exist to aid in the rebuilding of the relationship between the offender and the parent, a lack of research exists pertaining to what works and what programs need to be developed or improved to make an impact on improving the relationship and if the quality of the relationship has a role in recidivism Miller, 2006). Wildeman and Western (2010) argued that hardships of incarceration pose an increased risk to families made vulnerable by the loss of a parent.

The impact of the loss of a parent has a profound impact on the children, more likely to become delinquent themselves (Wildeman & Western, 2010). An argument exists that recidivism negates the supposed benefit of incarceration which is rehabilitation (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

The recommendation for improvement is reform in the prison system to increase the educational, vocational, and mental health support for those incarcerated (Miller, 2006; Wildeman & Western, 2010). Reform is suggested because increased education and mental health assistance will benefit the community by diminishing risk factors associated with recidivism (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

### **Research Methodology**

The literature review exhibited a variety of methodological approaches sharing similar perspectives of correctional education programs. A search of peer reviewed journals using EBSCO host in conjunction with Google Scholar yielded results qualitative and quantitative in nature.

I used a multiple case study design in my qualitative study. The use of a case study is appropriate to the research as an exploratory analysis. Yin (2009) stated the reason for conducting a case study derives from the need to collect specific data to better understand a specific social phenomena. The multiple case study design suits this study because of the exploration of offenders' experiences. A case study afforded the opportunity to identify and understand the different dimensions of the phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Leonard-Barton, 1990; Yin, 2009). A preference for this method exists, when boundaries blur between the context and the phenomenon (Van Raak &



Paulus, 2001; Yin, 2009). The multiple case study approach is a preferred approach when there is no prior research that allows conducting more broad-based data collection and analysis (Bazzoli, Harmata & Chan, 1998). It was further noted that the use of multiple cases in a single case study is more credible and reduces skepticism of the findings (Yin, 2009).

Consideration was given to use the quantitative or mixed method approaches. The study's focus on offender perception of correctional education programs, not suited to the objective analysis of the nature of quantitative research (Yin, 2009). These perceptions include the participant's thoughts, memories, and feelings. To gather the participant's perception areas not measurable by quantitative terms must be evaluated. To use a quantitative approach would require the use of surveys and questionnaires with predetermined responses. The use of the qualitative approach provided the participants the opportunity to reveal their perspectives of correctional education programs using open ended questions and ability for responses (Yin, 2009).

I also rejected the mixed method approach. Using the mixed method approach combines both qualitative (open ended) and quantitative (predetermined response) data collection (Creswell, 2011). Participant interviews were the primary source of data for the current study with the purpose to examine the offender's perception of correctional education programs. Other data was used to triangulate or confirm or challenge the participant's perception; however, the offender's perception was the primary focus.

## **Summary**

Many correctional education programs exist in place within the United States designed to aid in the reduction of recidivism. Even with these programs, over 54% of offenders will be re-incarcerated (NCDC, 2011). The primary issue discussed in the literature is the possible connection between correctional education and decreased recidivism. The multiple case study design was deemed appropriate for the study. The goal of Chapter 3 is to provide detailed information about the study's methodology to include: the researcher's role, research questions, setting, participant population, data collection procedures and analysis, establishing trustworthiness, limitations, ethics, and summary.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore how exoffenders describe their experiences with correctional education programs. In addition, I also examined how educational program participation impacts the goals, employment, and careers of the offender student upon release. With minimal research on the topic of offender perception of correctional education programs, a lack of information exists regarding the offender student experience (Brazzell et al., 2009). The goal of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used to address the research questions. Included in this chapter is an outline of the research questions, qualitative methodology, and research design. In addition to the setting, participant population, data collection procedures and analysis, establishing trustworthiness, and limitations are discussed. Chapter 3 concludes with ethical considerations regarding the treatment of the participants, the researcher's role and summary.

#### **Research Question**

There are two concerns that form the foundation of this study. The first concern is the offender's perception of the correctional education programs offered and the classroom environment. The second concern is how the offender perceives the correctional education program's impact on their reintegration into society and finding suitable employment. The primary research question guiding this study was the following:

RQ: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs completed within the past 3 years?

SQ: What are the exoffender perception of the impact of correctional education programs on post release employment?

To answer the research questions, I chose to use a qualitative research methodology. The conceptual framework formed the basis of the method for the study. The next section contains a discussion of the connection between the research questions and the conceptual framework.

### **Research Design and Approach**

The primary focus of the research questions for this study was to examine the lived experiences of offenders and their unheard perspectives regarding correctional education programs, with an emphasis on the impact of correctional education programs on their successful transition into society. The research pertaining to the impact of correctional education on recidivism implies a key factor to changing offender behavior and their beliefs leading to a successful re-entry into society (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil, Drapkin, MacKenzie, & Hickman, 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003; Taylor, 1992; Vacca, 2004; Ward, 2009).

Correctional education program availability, participation requirements, and incentives for participating are components of correctional education. These areas are addressed through information obtained from the North Carolina state prison websites in conjunction with information gained through my experience working in the organization. The information for the study came from the offender students. The interviews containing narratives of past employment and previous education experiences, correctional

education experiences to include classroom environment and peers, and postrelease employment and education goals were the focus of the data collection. To address the relationship between correctional education program participation and gaining suitable employment upon release, the questionnaire includes items that address the offender student's perception of potential future success in addition to future employment and educational goals.

The multiple case study design was used for this qualitative study. Stake (2006) stated that the use of this design suited the needs of this study when defining data gathering activities and to define data sources. The use of the multiple case design enables the researcher to triangulate the information gathered from the interview participants to develop an understanding of the data retrieved from multiple sources (Yin, 2009). For this study, the use of case study was preferred because of the contemporary issue of recidivism that cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2009).

Case studies focus on a unique aspect of the phenomenon. A case tells a story and to understand the story as a whole the different parts must be examined (Yin, 2009). A multiple case study attempts to develop a better understanding of a phenomenon through studying the individual parts and their connections (Bernard, 2013; Stake, 2006). Each participant told a single unique story; however, when these stories are together in a multiple case, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between correctional education programs and successful reintegration into society occurs. Other sources of data include reports of outcomes of the education classes, essays written during the

courses, training outcomes, tests, teachers' comments, which were included to support a better understanding of data, to allow for triangulation (Bernard, 2013, Yin, 2009).

Data triangulation occurs when multiple sources of data combine to support, confirm, or refute the primary data (Yin, 2009). In this study, the main source of data was the offender's interview responses, which included inquire about their perception of the correctional education programs offered, their perception of the classroom environment, and perception of success upon release.

Consideration was given to use the phenomenological method, but this approach would eliminate the inclusion of information used for triangulation. I considered and eliminated the narrative approach also. According to Bernard (2013), this approach focuses on an individual's life, which would not provide the specific data needed for this study. I rejected the ethnographic approach because, according to Sangasubana (2011), no shared cultural contexts existed between the participants. Grounded theory included consideration, but included rejection as well. This approach related to theory emerging as a result of the research on the offenders' perspective of correctional education programs.

## **Setting and Sample**

### **Selection of Participants**

This qualitative study used purposeful random sampling. According to Patton (2003), purposeful sampling is the selection of cases rich with information that will enhance the questions being studied. The focus of the data collection is on the impact of correctional education regarding potential success upon release from prison.

The offenders had to meet the following criteria to be included in the study. First, all participants of the case study were exoffenders. The organizations management team identified 40 individuals released from prison in the previous 3 year period (2011-2014). Stratifying factors were age, gender, and race. The 40 files made up the initial sample of prospective applicants. Personnel from the organization then contacted the individuals by letter explaining the study and inviting them to participate. The selected individuals were provided my contact information and advised to contact me within a predetermined time frame. The study included the first 20 who agreed to participate in the population.

### **Identifying Study Participants**

Patton (2003) identified the sampling strategy used as purposeful sampling. The intent of purposeful sampling is to show different perspectives (Patton, 2003). This case study's focus on the different perspectives of these 20 participants. These experiences include being incarcerated in NC, having the option to participate in correctional education programs while incarcerated, and being released from prison in the previous 3 year period.

Twenty study participants provided an indepth examination with various perspectives (Patton, 2003). With 20 interviews, the plan was to saturate the data to a point where no new themes emerged. According to Patton (2003), saturation occurs when the new data does not present new information on the phenomenon of study.

### **The Interview Guide**

According to Patton (2003), an interview guide is a list of questions to be explored during the interview. The guide exists to ensure the same questions are asked to

all of the participants. I may have asked additional or follow-up questions during the interview as needed. The use of a semistructured interview guide ensured standardization during the opening of the interview, while obtaining the participants' opinion regarding their experiences. The guide structure of the guide was to solicit information about the offenders' prior employment and educational experiences, correctional education experiences while incarcerated, and postrelease employment and education plans.

After answering the final interview question, I thanked each participant for their participation, as well as for providing their valuable insight. The terms of informed consent were discussed and the participants reassured that the transcripts and recording of the interview will be destroyed when no longer needed. After the participant left the room, 5-10 minutes were spent making field notes of the observations made during the interview such as the participant's demeanor.

### **Recording**

The interviews included a recording to aid in effective documentation. According to Patton (2003), the use of a recorder is not to eliminate the process of documenting field notes, rather its use helps the researcher to focus their attention and take detailed and focused notes, opposed to verbatim recall. Therefore, key terms and phrases noted during the interview were written on the interview guide. A check and test of the recorder took place prior to each interview, a single manila folder containing the participant's number used for each participant. The participants provided consent to record the interview prior to beginning the recording. Upon completion of the interviews, the next task was the transcription.



To encourage the participants to elaborate on their experiences, open ended questions were asked. To probe participants for more information, follow-up questions were asked. The purpose of these questions were to encourage elaboration, more detail, and clarification. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), the use of follow-up questions is a crucial factor in exploring issues that emerge that may lead to deeper insight.

The interviews took place in a private room at the transitional center or over the telephone. I met with each participant alone, without knowledge of the other participants. During the face-to-face interviews, the participants sat in a chair positioned directly in front of me. The *Echo Smartpen* by Livescribe recorded and later transcribed the sessions. This program and system linked my notes to an audio system that transcribes and plays back handwritten notes (Livescribe, 2014). This system also recorded audio during the interviews in addition to the digital audio recorder used for back-up (Livescribe, 2014).

## **Data Collection**

### **Offender's Interviews**

Contact was made with each potential participant identified by telephone. The details of the study to include: (a) location, (b) time, (c) purpose, (d) procedures, and (e) precautions considered to ensure physical and emotional safety. I reassured the participants that their information would be confidential and stored in a safe only accessible by the researcher.

All of the interviews took place in a private office or by telephone. The office included telephone access, where counselors could have been contacted if needed.

However, all interviews were conducted without the need to contact the counselors arising. Placed in each participant's individual folder were the signed consent letters. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant to protect their identity. Upon arrival and after a brief greeting and introduction, each participant was asked to provide the following information: race, age, number of siblings, and birth order. The interview commenced when the recording was started. The participants were advised that they are not obligated to answer any of the questions asked and they may terminate the interview at any time. Each interview was recorded and field notes taken to document body language and facial expressions. Most interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes and completed in one session.

Because of scheduling conflicts, one participant interview took place over the telephone. The interview protocol was the same for face-to-face and telephone interviews. At the onset of the telephone interview, the participant was provided the contact information for counseling services if needed. The consent letters signed by the participant were filed in individual folders. I assigned pseudonyms to the participant to protect their identity. The participant provided the following information: race, age, number of siblings, and birth order. The recorder was then started, where the interview commenced. The participant was advised that he was not obligated to answer any of the questions asked, where they could terminate the interview at any time. The interview was recorded and field notes taken to document change in tone of voice, etc. The interview lasted approximately 25 minutes, and completed in one session.

Creswell (2013) described member checking as valuable in the establishment of credibility. This process involved sharing portions of the final research with study participants to solicit their feedback regarding credibility and accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The member checking phase of the data collection consisted of providing a results summary to each study participants and the management staff of the transitional home.

### **Transcription**

I transcribed the interviews, as opposed to contracting a transcriptionist. Patton (2003) stated that completing one's own transcriptions provides insight and clarity through emersion. During transcription, the interview experience is relived, which provides rich data and insight. *Echo Smartpen* by Livescribe is a voice to text software that was used to aid in transcription (Livescribe, 2014). Upon completion, the transcribed interviews included placement in the respective participant's file.

### **Field Notes**

The final aspect of the data collection was field notes. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), field notes allow the researcher to record things outside of the context of the interview, to include: thoughts, ideas for inclusion in later interviews, and other relevant information. In the field notes are sketches of the office space, participant demeanor and appearance, and personal thoughts and reflections. The Field Notes Protocol worksheet was used to collect field notes. The Field Notes Protocol was developed as a resource to be used only during the interviews with participants.

### **Management of Data**

Each participant include the assignment of a research file. The files contain the following information: consent letter and interview transcript. In addition, each folder includes notes related to the individual interview. All documents, files, recordings, and recorder are secured in a safe that only I may access to for a period of 5 years. All electronic files will be deleted and destroyed upon study completion and dissertation approval; all paper files and cassette tapes will be destroyed by incinerator 5 years after graduation.

### **Data Analysis**

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) stated that in a qualitative study, the data analysis begins at the start of the study and is a continuous process. The analysis phase includes the examination of large amounts of data to categorize be emerging themes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The following is a description of the interpreting, coding, categorizing, and reporting of the data.

#### **Coding**

Coding is a continuous process comprised of sorting and defining bits of information which applies to the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The data includes interview transcripts, field notes, and additional documents such as test scores and essays completed by the participant. The premise of coding offers the ability to connect similar data for the purpose of interpretation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The interview transcripts and field notes were part of the coding process. Each document was carefully reviewed and labelled accordingly. Each code identified a concept or idea in the study.

## Matrices

Patton (2003) described the use of matrices as a way to display data to be interpreted. In this study thematic matrices are used. The matrices were instrumental in the identification of themes in the data (Patton, 2003). Displayed on the top of each matrix is the theme (ex: TEACHER). The pseudonyms were in the column on the left of the matrix. Listed in the column to the right of the participant name is the statement relevant to the theme. The data was copied and pasted into the matrix from the transcripts (see Table 1). Another matrix using Researcher as the participant name was created to record appropriate field notes (see Table 2). The triangulation of data aided in the credibility of the study and provided an opportunity for me to test for consistency (Patton, 2003).

Table 1

### *Teacher*

Participant	Response
John	Ms. White listened in class.
Jane	I didn't want to let Ms. Johnson down.
Susan	Mr. Smith made learning fun.
Bobby	I really believed Ms. Duncan cared about my wellbeing.

Table 2

*Researcher*

Participant	Expression / Body Language
John	No change.
Jane	No change
Susan	Smiled when reflected on Mr. Smith.
Bobby	Appeared upset

### **Ethical Issues and Considerations**

The study participants were exoffenders. The is a vulnerable population protected from emotional and physical harm during the process by (a) conducting the interviews in a private office or over the telephone; (b) participants assigned pseudonyms and all files destroyed once no longer needed; (c) the interview could be terminated at any time with the option to continue at a later date; and (d) a counselor was on stand-by if needed. Participants were contacted after (a) IRB approval: 12-23-14-0307691 and (b) after receiving signed consent letters. None of the interviews were terminated and counselor services were not needed during or immediately following the interviews.

Personal contacts through telephone calls were conducted to explain the study to the participants regarding the extent of their participation. I assured each participant they could withdraw from the interview at any time. If during the interview the participant becomes upset, the interview would be terminated with the option to continue at a later date and time (Patton, 2003). However, all interviews were completed in one session.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As an educator, former law enforcement officer, correctional officer, and prison counselor, I witness the impact of education on success. As a result, I want to determine how to best aid correctional education programs to assist offenders upon release. Careful care is paramount in ensuring my position regarding correctional education did not interfere with the research, data collection, and analysis.

### **Summary**

The use of the multiple case study design was appropriate to investigate the offenders' perception of correctional education programs. An assessment of other qualitative approaches was conducted; however, the multiple case approach best addressed the research questions. The participants were exoffenders identified through purposeful sampling. Interviews took place after IRB: 12-23-14-0307691 approval and obtaining signed consent forms. All interviews took place in a private office. Coding and matrices were used to triangulate the data. Confidentiality was provided through storing all data in a safe. Chapter 4 contains details about the findings with references to the research questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain the perspective of offenders regarding correctional education programs and their efficacy or success. The primary research question for this qualitative case study was the following: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs completed within the past 3 years? The secondary research question was the following: What are the exoffender perception of the impact of correctional education programs on post release employment?

This chapter has seven sections. Section 1 covers the setting and external influences. Section 2 includes discussion of participant demographics. Data collection procedures make up Section 3. Section 4 is comprised of data analysis. Section 5 covers evidence of trustworthiness. Section 6 reviews the results and Section 7 the summary. Direct quotes from study participants will be found throughout the chapter. Codes (ex. BB1) are used to maintain the anonymity of study participants.

### **Settings**

According to the board of directors, the transitional home that the study participants reside opened in 1999, established on the principal of assisting recently released exoffenders reintegrate into society and become productive members of the community. The agency houses over 120 individuals and has 80 beds reserved for exoffenders.



### **External Setting Influences**

There were no personal or organizational requirements or conditions that influenced the study participants. However, all of the participants resided at the transitional agency. Residing at the agency likely influenced the participant's perspectives.

The agency executive board of directors agreed to identify a list of 40 persons over the age of 18 who were released from prison 1-3 years prior to the study. The list consisted of 10 women and 30 men. All of the persons on the initial list received a letter. The letter requested individuals interested in participating to contact me immediately. Within 1 week, 20 potential participants responded to the request, six women and 14 men. I spoke with each individual who agreed to participate to schedule interviews at the transitional agency. I reminded the individuals that they were not required to participate and could withdraw at any time. I also advised them to bring the signed consent form to the interview. One individual was not available to meet because of work obligations; I advised this participant to mail the consent form prior to the interview.

### **Demographics**

All 20 individuals who agreed to participate completed the interview. Of the 20 persons who completed the interview, 16 were White and four were Black. Fourteen men and six women completed the interview. Of the 14 men, three were Black. Of the six women, one was Black. All participants were released from prison 1-3 years prior to the study and had been at the transitional center for a minimum of 30 days.

The participants ranged in age from 19 years to 52 years, with a median age of 27. In terms of education, nine participants failed to complete high school. Two participants earned a GED. One completed college and had a bachelor's degree in business. Three participants attended at least 1 year of college. One participant held a cosmetology license. At the time of incarceration, six participants were unemployed. Other occupations at the time of arrest included bartender, butcher, cook, carpenter, construction worker, electrician, roofer, office manager, nurse, waitress, and welding. Four participants secured employed for more than 3 years prior to incarceration. Two participants secured employed for more than 2 years prior to incarceration. The remaining 14 participants secured employment for fewer than 2 years prior to being incarcerated. Since entering the transitional center, none of the participants were rearrested.

### **Data Collection**

All 20 study participants completed all of the interview questions. Both the Data Collection Tool and Questionnaire included completion between December 30 and December 31, 2014. With the exception of one participant, 19 interviews took place in the conference room at the transitional center. One interview took place over the telephone because of the participant's work schedule.

I spoke with all participants prior to meeting for the interview. At the beginning of each interview I explained and demonstrated the operation of the recording devices. All participants were aware of my previous employment in the prison system, where several stated that their participation, in addition to my background, would aid in

providing awareness to the topic. All interviews took place in a private conference room with no one else present. I conducted the telephone interview over my cellular phone, while sitting in the conference room at the center.

Upon completion of the description of the recording devices, I collected the consent form and begin the interview by turning on the recording devices. The devices used to record included a digital audio recorder and the Echo Smartpen by LiveScribe. The use of these devices simultaneously provided the opportunity to take written notes, while recording the session.

Once the recording began, I asked questions exactly as presented in the dissertation proposal and did not deviate from the interview protocol. Upon conclusion of the interviews, the recording devices were shut off, and I asked each participant if there were any questions. Questions asked focused on the process of receiving a PhD and if I believed this research would really help bring change to correctional education. I explained my experience in the process of completing the PhD program in addition to my hopes of bringing awareness to the issue. I then thanked them for their participation and sharing their experience with me and wished them the best of luck in their future.

### **Data Analysis**

Demographic data were analyzed and coded first through the creation of a Summary Coding Sheet. Two categories were identified: B = Black and W = White. I developed six categories to document the participant's age: 18-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, and 46 and over. Two categories identified gender: male and female. The number of years since the participants were released from prison included division into three

categories: 1 year prior to the study, 2 years prior to the study, and 3 years prior to the study. The type of correctional education program the participant participated in while incarcerated included division into nine categories: job skills, prerelease program, life skills, adult basic education, GED, college and vocational training, counseling, and other. A similar pattern was used to document education ending with 4-year-degree as that was the highest level of education completed by a participant. Responses to employment status at time of incarceration included division into two categories: yes and no. The type of employment each participant was involved in, to include unemployment, was noted. Categories identifying the length of time of employment were (a) less than 1 year, (b) 1-2 years, (c) 3-4 years, and (d) more than 5 years.

The remaining questions pertained to the participants' past education experiences (preincarceration), correctional education experience (during incarceration), and the impact, if any, of the correctional education experience on postincarceration employment (after incarceration). The categories identified were Pre Incarceration (PI); During Incarceration (DI); and After Incarceration (AI). Any common or key words, terms, or phrases identified were listed in one of the aforementioned categories. Participants were assigned a code based on interview order. All participant codes begin with Boderick Bennett (BB). The first participant was BB1, the second BB2, the third BB3, and so on. See Table 3.

Table 3

*Codes*

Code Explanation	Code	Categories
Participant Identification Code	P	BB1-BB20
Participant Ethnicity	E	B – Black / W – White
Participant Age	A	18 – 25 26 – 30 31 – 35 36 – 40 41 – 45 46 and over
Gender	G	M – Male / F – Female
Length of Time Since Release	LT	1 Year 2 Years 3 Years
Correctional Education Program Involved	CE	Job Skills Pre-Release Program Life Skills Adult Basic Education GED College Vocational Training; Counseling Other
Level of Education	LE	Elementary School Middle School High School GED Some College 4 Year Degree
Employment Status at Time of Incarceration	ES	Yes No
Type of Work at Time of Incarceration	WT	
Length of Employment at Time of Incarceration	TW	less than 1 year 1-2 years 3-4 years 5 or more years
Pre / During / After Incarceration Experience	PI / DI / AI	

I recorded the total number of responses for each category into the matrix. The grid format of the matrix increased the ability to find patterns in responses. It took minimal effort to determine substance abuse treatment, GED, and vocational training were the most participated correctional education programs.

### **Research Questions Data**

The Echo Smartpen transcribes all audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document in addition to recording all written notes. These files were uploaded onto my computer. This process enabled simultaneous review of written notes and audio recordings from the interviews while transcribing the raw data. I created a response form, which enabled the ability to record and review all responses on one document. Upon completion of transcription, an examination of responses provided identification of common themes which enabled division of responses into appropriate categories.

Being the primary focus was the social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 2000), and the eight stages of human development theory (Erikson, 1968), it was imperative to capture participant responses regarding their perception and experiences of education to include correctional education. Their responses were coded under: Social Learning Theory (SL); Self-Efficacy Theory (SE); and Eight Stages of Human Development Theory (ES). Review of the responses revealed two response categories: in alignment with a minimum of two theories or not.

The first question asked participants to talk about their experience in elementary school. The code for this question was PI for Pre Incarceration. I observed that the responses fell into three broad categories: great, normal or not so good. The response categories developed for this question were: GR – Great, NL – Normal, and NG – Not so good. Responses categorized as great identified factors participants enjoyed, such as: a lot of fun, stress free, enjoyed learning (SE), teachers were nice (SL), had a lot of friends (SL), and good student (SE). Responses categorized as normal identified factors

participants thought were normal, such as: average student (SE), nothing stands out, and regular family (SL). Responses categorized as not good identified factors participants identified as not being good, such as: moved around a lot (SL, SE), dad lost his job and we moved to a bad neighborhood (SL, SE), and I was molested (SE).

The next question focused on the participants experience in middle and high school. These responses fell into two broad categories: good and bad. The response categorized developed for this question were: GO – Good and BA – Bad. Responses categorized as good identified factors participants identified as good such as: a good athlete (SE, ES), made good grades (SE), and popular (SE, SL). Responses categorized as bad identified factors participants identified as bad, such as: fell in with the wrong crowd (SL), began to experiment with drugs (SL), grades started to fall, acted out, and promiscuous (SL, SE).

The next set of questions followed under the category DI for During Incarceration. This series of questions inquired why participants participated in correctional education programs while incarcerated; how they found out about the correctional education programs; their experience in the programs; and the impact of correctional education programs on their transition out of prison. Responses included categorization by theory (SL, SE, and / or ES). Responses I considered related to the social learning theory were those that focused on the participant's behavior being influenced by the environment. Responses categorized as SL identified factors participants identified that related to the social learning theory, such as: "I begin taking

classes because I saw other inmates were going so they could get out of their cell” (BB7) and “I saw that inmates that took classes were offered jobs” (BB3).

Responses I considered related to the self-efficacy theory were those that focused on the participant’s behavior being influenced by a desire to do better or self-improve. Responses categorized as SE identified factors participants identified that related to the self-efficacy theory, such as: “I wanted to do better for myself” (BB2), “I wanted to have a better life once I was released from prison” (BB19), “I needed to know I could finish my GED” (BB14), “participating in programs knocked days off my sentence” (BB16) and “I wanted to make my family proud” (BB18).

Responses I considered related to the eight stages of human development theory were those that focused on the participant’s behavior being influenced by their biological, environment or culture. Responses categorized as ES identified factors participants identified that related to the eight stages of human development theory, such as: “I wanted to do better for myself” (BB11), “I wanted to make my mother proud” (BB1) and “Some of the teachers made me feel I could do better” (BB13).

It was easy to identify that over half of the participants secured employment through the transitional home. Participant BB16 stated, “The transitional center opened doors for me that would not have been opened otherwise. I have a city job and I do not believe they would have hired me with a record if not for this program.”

Another theme that emerged centered on participants feelings about the center. All participants considered the center to be a positive experience. BB2 stated, “The



friendships I have developed while living here will help me stay straight, we are a family.”

A final theme to emerge was the lack of programs available to participants that were incarcerated in county jails. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Justice Reinvestment Act places misdemeanor offenders with less than 180 day sentences in county jails. Markham (2011) argued this outcome was an issue because of the lack of programs offered to offenders incarcerated in county jails. Half of the study participants stated that outside of religious classes (Bible Study), there were not any correctional education programs offered in the county jail they served their sentence. Two participants stated they had access to substance abuse programs while incarcerated in county jail (BB18, BB19).

This response outcome corroborates with Motivans (2011) which stated that less than half of offenders incarcerated have access to correctional education programs. Two participants also stated they could not participate in the programs that they felt would benefit them, because they “were not offered” at the facility they “were housed” and transfer requests “were denied” (BB3, BB11). The results corroborate with research conducted by Brazzel et al. (2009) which stated offenders are deprived of correctional education programs because the facility where they are housed cannot accommodate their correctional education needs.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

As indicated in Chapter 3, data triangulation was to be used to establish credibility. I accomplished credibility through the combination of information received from the participants and essays written during the courses, training outcomes, tests, and teachers' comments provided by the participants. There was corroboration between the data collected from study participants and the supporting documents. This corroboration supported the themes that emerged and aided in the establishment of credibility of my data.

In addition, the use of descriptions in the participants own words aid in credibility (Patton, 2003). The use of the Echo Smartpen was a significant asset to the research. The ability to integrate the participant's words proved to add a richer and more realistic feel to the findings. While there were themes and patterns that emerged, participants found different values and had different experiences with correctional education. All of the information aided in the telling of the complete story of the participant's experience with correctional education.

Another method used to establish credibility was member checking. This process included completion at the conclusion of each interview. While reviewing my handwritten notes, I repeated out loud to each participant what I heard and asked for clarification as needed. Finally, I assured all participants that they would receive a synopsis of the findings and be afforded the opportunity to comment. Comments from the

dissertation committee were the final factor contributing to the credibility of the dissertation.

### **Transferability**

The use of the Echo Smartpen in addition to the digital audio recorder ensured transcripts of all interviews were verbatim. The data presented is a revealing and accurate depiction of the study.

### **Dependability**

Dependability was addressed throughout the entire process of the research study. The interviewing of multiple participants in conjunction with information gleaned from the supporting documents provided triangulation. Committee feedback and the IRB process of Walden University ensured the research questions were clear. Adhering to the coding process outlined and approved by the committee and IRB ensured integrity during coding.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure the conclusions were free of biases, the data presented is the data provided by participants. Based on the data provided by participants are all conclusions. During the data collection and process stage, I maintained accurate notes of the process so that I may articulate the findings accurately.

## **Results**

There was one primary research question and one secondary research questions for this qualitative case study. The primary research question asked: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education

programs completed within the past 3 years? The overall perception of the participants were that of lacking. The participants felt many of the programs may have contributed to their success upon release, if they were able to take advantage of the opportunity and complete the programs. Many felt the programs in place were not realistic and provided students with a false sense of security. Six participants responded that correctional education programs should provide offenders with knowledge of the outside world and let them know that completing a certificate program may not lead to a job (BB1, BB4, BB9, BB11, BB16, and BB20). Two participants responded that funding for programs “have been cut to the point there was nothing to do besides go to Bible study and NA/AA classes” (BB12 and BB18). Four participants responded that their experience changed their lives (BB2, BB 17, BB18, and BB19). All participants responded the experience taught them that prison was not a place they wanted to be.

The secondary research question asked: What are the exoffender perception of the impact of correctional education programs on post release employment? Sixteen participants responded that correctional education programs did not have any impact on their post release employment. BB9 responded that a HR course completed while incarcerated provided the skills for her present employment. BB10 responded the Job Readiness program completed while incarcerated taught interview and resume writing skills. BB16 responded the correctional education courses aided in having the right mindset to be successful upon release. BB17 responded although the correctional education programs did not aid in finding a job, the lesson learned from the entire incarceration experience was to think before speaking.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain the perspective of offenders regarding correctional education programs. There were two research questions. The primary research question: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs completed within the past 3 years? The overall perception of the participants were that the correctional education programs were lacking relevancy to real world outcomes and unrealistic.

The secondary research question: What are the exoffender perception of the impact of correctional education programs on post release employment? As previously stated, the overall perception were that the correctional education programs were lacking and did not aid in securing employment post release. Chapter 5 provides a review of the study results, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research and implications for social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain the perspective of offenders regarding correctional education programs and their efficacy or success. The primary research question for this qualitative case study was the following: What are the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs completed within the past 3 years? The secondary research question was the following: What are the exoffender perception of the impact of correctional education programs on post release employment?

### **Concise Summary of Findings**

Key findings include the categorization into three broad categories: preincarceration, during incarceration, and after incarceration. The categories included the exoffenders; perspective of correctional education programs and the perceived impact on their postrelease employment. The overall perception of offenders of existing correctional education programs was not good. Participants felt the programs were unrealistic and did not aid in a successful transition out of prison. Four participants did respond that some aspect of their correctional education experience had an impact on their postrelease employment.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

According to Bloom (2010), correctional education programs are imperative to the success of people difficult to employ. Exoffenders fit into this category. Benefits of correctional education program participation while incarcerated and the benefits on

postrelease transition were presented in Chapter 2. The findings of this study will be examined to determine the extent they confirm, disconfirm, or extend current knowledge.

According to Vacca (2004), a majority of exoffenders are unemployed because of they lack education and job skills. BB8 responded that without the services provided by the transitional center, they would not have been able to secure employment. This participant further stated that because of the sentence they were not able to complete the correctional education program in which they were enrolled. This result corroborates the study by Crayton and Neusteter (2008), who found that many offenders do not complete correctional education programs at the time of their release.

According to Pryor and Thompkins (2013), exoffenders are at risk of recidivating if they cannot capitalize on the acquired education and skills. The lack of correctional education programs offered, and the fact that many offenders leave prison without completing the programs, places them at risk for success postrelease. Participants BB12 and BB17 both stated their reluctance to complete their GED's upon release from prison because of the cost to take the test. Participants BB12 and BB17 further stated because of work obligations, they did not have the time to go to classes.

Another way correctional education programs may aid exoffenders is to bridge the gap between the release from prison and secured employment. According to Bierens and Carvalho (2011), the job search period following release is when an exoffender is most likely to recidivate. Bloom (2009) noted that correctional education programs may aid in exoffenders securing employment more quickly during this critical postincarceration period. This outcome proved true for this study's participants. Each

participant included job placement by the case manager at the center within 2 weeks of arrival. The quick placement enabled them to earn money, which reduced the likelihood of recidivism.

The reduction of recidivism is another benefit of correctional education programs (Redcross et al., 2009). None of the participants of this study were arrested since being placed in a job by the center. Participants BB9, BB10, BB16, and BB17 all responded that correctional education programs aided in their postrelease employment.

A final benefit of correctional education programs participation is awareness of soft skills (Bloom, 2010). According to Bloom (2010), soft skills are personality traits, communication, language, and characteristics that may be picked up through interaction with others. Participant BB17 focused on this factor. This participant discussed habits developed in prison that they were able to recognize and change through their correctional education experience.

Of the many topics discussed in the literature review, five included confirmation in this current study. These results include (a) exoffenders being unemployed because of a lack of education and job skills, (b) exoffenders being at an increased risk of recidivating if they cannot capitalize on correctional education and skills, (c) correctional education bridging the gap between prison and finding employment, (d) correctional education programs aiding in the reduction of recidivism, and (e) correctional education program participation aiding in the correction of soft skills.

The theoretical framework for this study included the foundation in Bandura's (1973) social learning theory, Bandura's (2000) self-efficacy theory, and Erikson's



(1968) eight stages of human development theory. Bandura (1973) proposed that children learn behavior from mimicking others. In addition to parents and caregivers, children learn behavior from friends and teachers (Bandura, 1973). This outcome relates to the offenders because the decision to participate in correctional education programs may stem from prior experiences. In addition, how the student acts in the classes is influenced by behaviors learned in previous settings (Bandura, 1973).

The self-efficacy theory is an extension of the social learning theory (Bandura, 2000). The self-efficacy theory is used to describe a person's ability to overcome life obstacles (Bandura, 2000), which relates to this study because many of the participants who decided to participate in correctional education programs did so for self-improvement. Being self-efficient plays a role in reaching personal goals (Bandura, 2000). Completing a correctional education program is a personal goal impacted by the participant's desire to better themselves and change the course of their future.

The eight stages of human development theory is similar to the social learning theory, which proposes that behavioral learning takes place through watching others and the self-efficacy theory, which propose an individual's environment, biological, and cultural influences impact their behavior (Bandura, 1973; Erikson, 1968; Ormond, 1999). This theory applies to the prison setting because behavior is learned (Bandura, 1973), where a person must learn to survive in prison. The decision to participate in correctional education programs is not popular in prison, where an individual must have self-efficacy to persevere.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A limitation of the study was the number of participants. However, the methodology selected did not require a large sample size (Patton, 2003). Because the participants included help in finding employment by the case manager at the center, this may limit the transferability of the data.

### **Recommendation**

A recommendation includes conducting a future qualitative, longitudinal study on offenders who completed a correctional education program while incarcerated to follow them through their job search activities and subsequent employment upon release. This strategy would aid in measuring the perceived and actual impact of correctional education programs and participation on recidivism and postrelease employment.

In this qualitative case study, I connected with individuals 1-3 years following their release regarding participation in correctional education programs. I did not chronicle their experiences immediately upon release and while seeking employment. Researching this aspect may provide insight regarding factors that may contribute to their success, failure, and challenges that may be encountered.

### **Implications**

The impact on social change resulting from this study are multifaceted across several levels. There are implications for individuals with criminal records, organizations that offer correctional education programs, and exoffenders returning to society.

The data from this study corroborates with studies conducted by Bloom (2010) and Redcross et al. (2010), who stated that correctional education program participation

can increase the odds of successful reintegration into society. Sometimes exoffenders face many of the same struggles as society members without incarceration in that many exoffenders have families, struggle to support themselves, or lack the means to attend school and survive without working (Crayton & Neusteter, 2008). These outcomes were true for many of the participants of this study.

By presenting correctional education programs through the eyes of the exoffender, this study provided insight for organizations that offer correctional education programs. There is much to learn from the perspectives of exoffenders who participated in correctional education programs, especially regarding what was effective and what was not. Society as a whole may benefit because a successful exoffender has a positive impact on the community.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study provided the perspective of exoffenders regarding correctional education programs. Conclusions, based on the study findings, include that under the right circumstances, correctional education programs provide necessary support for released offenders to successfully reenter society. The study participant's experiences provided insight into their perspective of correctional education programs. These findings may aid in initiating positive social change in correctional education programs geared to assist exoffenders successfully reintegrate into society.

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## Appendix A: Letter to Program Director

Name of Program Director  
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Boderick Bennett and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the offender perspective of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety educational programs. There are a vast number of studies detailing the perspective of correctional education professionals and administrators. What is not known, however, is the offenders' perspective. This research will provide insight into offenders' correctional education experiences.

Your assistance in conducting this much needed research is important. If willing, I need for you to identify adults (over the age of 18) exoffenders who have been released from a North Carolina prison within the previous three year period (2011-2014). Identification of exoffenders fitting this profile will provide an avenue to identify and contact participants needed for this study. Once identified, I would like to speak with them to discuss the nature of this study. The participants are free to choose whether or not to participate and can discontinue participation at any time. Information provided by the participants will be kept strictly confidential.

I would welcome a telephone call from you to discuss any questions you may have concerning this study and your role in identifying research participants. I can be reached at [boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu](mailto:boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu).

Sincerely,

Boderick Bennett  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

## Appendix B: Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant  
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Boderick Bennett and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the offender perspective of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety educational programs. There is a lot of literature on the subject based on the perspective of correctional education professionals and administrators; however, there is limited information based on the offenders' perspective. My goal is to shed light on the offenders' correctional education experiences.

I realize that your time is important to you and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. In order to gain insight of your experiences, I am requesting to interview you one time either in person or over the telephone. The interview will last approximately one hour and take place at your transitional home or over the telephone. Upon completion of the study, you will be asked to participate in a second conversation in person or over the telephone to solicit feedback and ensure accuracy of the interview. You do not have to say or do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. The interviews are designed to simply get to know you and learn about your experience with correctional education programs. All information gathered during our interview is confidential and only accessed by me.

Please note I cannot include any of my previous clients in the study. It is imperative to maintain a boundary between my professional and student researcher roles.

If you are interested in participating and being interviewed, please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can talk. You can email me at [boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu](mailto:boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu). I look forward to hearing from you.

Boderick Bennett  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

## Appendix C: Data Collection Tool

**Please take a moment before we begin our interview to answer these brief questions. If you would rather skip a question, please do so. When you are finished, please let me know so we may begin the interview. Thank you for your time.**

1. With what race or ethnic group do you identify? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_ How many siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_ What is your birth order? \_\_\_\_
3. What is the highest grade you completed in school? \_\_\_\_
4. Were you employed before you were incarcerated? \_\_\_\_
5. If so, what type of work were you doing? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What education/training/faith-based program(s) did you participate while incarcerated?
  - Job Skills
  - Pre-Release Program
  - Life Skills
  - Adult Basic Education
  - GED
  - College
  - Vocational Training
  - Counseling
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Questionnaire

You are not obligated to answer any of the questions asked and may terminate the interview at any time.

*Pre - Incarceration*

What, if anything, can you tell me about your elementary school experience?

What, if anything, can you tell me about your middle/high school experience?

*During Incarceration*

Why did you start taking classes while incarcerated? How did you find out about available classes and programs?

Tell me about your experience in correctional education programs.

How, if at all, did your correctional education experience help you during your transition out of prison?

*After Incarceration*

It has been one-three years since your release from prison. Tell me about your employment history since your release.

Tell me about an experience, if any, where you feel you have been discriminated against or did not receive a job based on your criminal record?

On a time line can you indicate your employment history since your release?

How, if at all, did your correctional education experience help you to transition into a job?

What, if anything, did you learn from your correctional education experience that you apply in your personal life today?

## Appendix E: Field Notes Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Background:

Voice Tone:

Facial Expressions:

Body Language:

Follow-up Questions:

## Appendix F: Consent Form

### An Offender Perspective of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Correctional Education Programs

You are invited to participate in a research study of the offender perspective of correctional education programs. You were selected because you meet the following criteria: exoffenders, over the age of 18, released from prison in the previous 3 year period (2011-2014). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before acting on this invitation to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Boderick Bennett, Doctoral Candidate at Walden University. IRB approval #12-23-14-0307691. Expiration date: 12-23-2015.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experience with the correctional education programs offered in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview in person or over the telephone, lasting approximately one hour in length.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Walden University, the State of North Carolina, or the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. If you initially decide to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time later without affecting those relationships. Note: The interviews will be audio recorded.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study you may terminate your participation at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful.

The potential benefit of participating in this study may come in the form of providing insight which may lead to improved correctional education programs.

**Compensation:**

There is no form of compensation for participation.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Anything said to the researcher is private, unless the possibility of someone being hurt is divulged. In any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of providing accurate description of your experience. Audio files will be destroyed at the completion of the study, which will be within one year.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Boderick Bennett. The researcher's advisor is Dr. Tina Jaeckle. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Boderick Bennett at [boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu](mailto:boderick.bennett@waldenu.edu) or Dr. Tina Jaeckle at [tine.jaeckle@waldenu.edu](mailto:tine.jaeckle@waldenu.edu). The Research Participant Advocate at Walden University is Dr. Leilani Endicott, you may contact her at 1-800-925-3368, ext. 312-1210 or [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu) if you have questions about your participation in this study.

You will receive a copy of this form from the researcher.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant

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Signature

Date

---



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Signature of Investigator

Date

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