

# Original Article: Effectiveness of Correctional Education System in Georgia State Prisons: Labeling Theory as Sociological Approach

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## ABSTRACT

The overall purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of correctional education programs in America generally, and in the state of Georgia, specifically, and its role to decrease post-release prisoners' recidivism. In addition, relying on labeling theory, this study aims to explore how the understanding of this theory could help reduce the stigma toward the educated ex-prisoners, who received educational programs while in prison. The basic design of this study was meta-analysis method. The researcher conducted a comprehensive literature search for published and unpublished studies released between 1980 and 2011. A correlation between recidivism reduction and participation in correctional education programs. The correctional education programs can help ex-prisoners start their lives after release; also, offenders who participated in education programs while incarcerated showed lower rates of recidivism, and they get a higher salary than other uneducated ex-prisoners.

## Introduction

In this research, we introduced the correctional education programs in the USA in general, and in Georgia state in specific. The researcher reviewed the rule of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy NAAL and how their assessment helped to improve the accuracy of national subpopulation estimation and provide information on the literacy skills of federal and state inmates. The researcher identified the historical and intellectual condition that assisted to invent

correctional and educational programs in prisons. Specifically, Georgia state correctional education system, goals, services, and how the Department of Corrections determine who needs literacy services were reviewed. Also, statistical figures were provided to acknowledge the advantages and features of correctional education programs, and to see whether the educational programs have successfully achieved its goals. Also, Pennsylvania and Auburn systems were compared to determine which one is closely correlated with the educational programs or services. Finally, labeling theory was

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applied to understand how the outcomes of education programs assist in minimizing the stigma towards ex-offenders.

### **An overview of National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and U.S. Correctional Education Programs**

The individuals within the formal education do learn skills and gain knowledge which helps them to navigate their life. As we all know that there is a correlation between the low levels of education and poverty or unemployment which may lead to committing the crime then incarcerated. Here, we will review some ways to assess the literacy among prisoner on the way to introduce the correctional education programs in the USA prisons. In the beginning, it is important to give a summary about the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). NAAL is a national representative assessment of English literacy among American adults aged 16 and older. NAAL provides information on adults' literacy performance, characteristics that are of interest to researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the general public. In 2003, in order to provide a separate estimate of literacy for the prisoner, the NAAL assessed 1,200 inmates of federal and state prisons who aged 16 and older. The 2003 and 1992 NAAL covered the same content and the definition of literacy. NAAL defined the literacy as decoding and comprehending text, and the main purpose of that is to achieve a specific objective. Haigler (1994) outlined the three measures used to assess literacy:

#### *Prose literacy*

It is defined as the abilities and information required to complete writing assignments. Editorials, news reports, pamphlets, and instructional materials are all forms of prose. Expository, narrative, procedural, and persuasive texts are all types of prose texts, (Haigler, 1994).

#### *Document literacy*

It is the knowledge and abilities required to complete document-related tasks. Job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug or food labels are all examples of documents (Haigler, 1994).

#### *Quantitative literacy*

It is the abilities and knowledge needed to complete quantitative activities. Balancing a checkbook, calculating a gratuity, filling out an order form, or calculating the amount of interest on a loan from an advertising are all examples (Haigler, 1994).

Hence, the importance of NAAL lies in the estimation of the breadth of adult literacy in the United States. Then, based on that assessment the researchers, practitioners, and policymakers could simply design education programs to help the prisoner to improve their self, (Haigler, 1994). Also, Haigler (1994) mentioned the two reasons to assess the prisoner literacy skills; to improve the accuracy of national subpopulation assessment, and to provide information on the literacy skills of federal and state inmates (Haigler, 1994).

Between 1992 and 2003, there were significant changes in the jail population and prisoner literacy. Greenberg *et al.*, (2007) stated that in 2003, a lower percentage of prison convicts dropped out before graduating from high school than in 1992. In 2003, 9% of jail convicts dropped out of school before starting high school, and 28% started high school but did not get a diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential/high school equivalency certificate, compared with 13% and 36% in 1992 (Greenberg *et al.*, 2007). In addition, convicts' parents were better educated in 2003 than they were in 1992. In 2003, around 33% of inmates had parents who had achieved at least some post-secondary education, compared with 25% in 1992 (Greenberg *et al.*, 2007).

We will state some concepts of correctional education programs in the United States briefly and in general. Most state correctional institutions, in fact, provide some form of correctional education, such as secondary or GED education, vocational training, special education, and college courses. Correctional education purpose, management, and process might vary from state to state. For instance, some states like Texas and Ohio own any special correctional district, and some provide training programs, or GED preparation by contracting with community colleges. Also, some entities, state departments of corrections, education, or public safety, could finance or function correctional education programs for their prison system, (Davis *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, private correction

operation companies must provide a correctional education for adult prisoners. It is worth mentioning that in 2011, almost 8% of the US prisons' population was housed in privately operated facilities. Finally, states also vary as to whether involvement in correctional education programs for the adult prisoner is voluntary or mandatory (Davis *et al.*, 2013). Davis *et al.* (2013) mentioned that the lack of awareness of program opportunities, reduced funding for correctional education programs because of state budget constraints or competing demands could reduce the rates of participation, for instance, giving the individuals the opportunity to select between career training or education programs (Davis *et al.*, 2013).

### **Correctional Education Services/programs**

#### *Historical and intellectual background*

Historically, and the Federal Prison Website (n.d.) stated that the earliest prisons, created by the Quakers in 1791, were intended to ensure public safety and reform prisoners. The initial prison's schools were focused on the spiritual instruction (Federal Prison Website, n.d.). Also, in the next century, New York State functioned prisoners at mass manufacturing jobs, but later the education programs stole time from labor and so was done away with (Federal Prison Website, n.d.). The Federal Prison Website (n.d.) mentioned the importance of the first post-secondary education programs such vocational training, which would help the prisoner to find a job after release (Federal Prison Website, n.d.). Meanwhile, the education programs stopped during the Great Depression and came back again at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically after the Rebellion movement at Attica State Prison in New York, (Federal Prison Website, n.d.). Chlup (2005) stated that "in 1971, the inmate uprising at the Attica Correctional Facility in Attica, New York, resulted in the deaths of 11 prison employees and the 32 unarmed prisoners" (P.24). The provision of rehabilitative programming and access to educational programs were among the demands of the convicts for political rights and better living conditions. Since 1982, 350 prison education programs have been flourished (Federal Prison Website, n.d.). Additionally, Pell Grants program supported the BA and MA level, community colleges, and technical or vocational schools inside the prisons.

In 1994, Pell Grants and student loans for prisoners were eliminated, and high school and equivalent programs were suffering because of the increasing of crime numbers. Finally, according to Federal Prison Website (n.d.) government financing for post-secondary education in prisons was removed in 2012, so the Obama administration launched a pilot program to explore if college classes can help reduce recidivism by providing financial aid through the Pell Grants program, (Federal Prison Website, n.d.).

#### *Goals of correctional education programs in Georgia state*

The Prisoner Educational program is an essential component of rehabilitative programming offered at most of the prisons in the USA, for the prisoners who have a low level of education. Actually, and in general, learning behind bars is a good opportunity for the prisoner to improve their academic skills and prepare for the next step after the release. Here, we are answering the question of why it is important to provide an academic education to offenders in prisons. As we said before, providing this kind of programs would help the prisoner to complete their education and get ready for the life after release. Thus, prisoner who participated in academic education programs will have a great chance to find a job and earn money, and this could keep him or her away from the criminal path. "Offenders who engaged in education programs while incarcerated exhibited lower rates of recidivism after three years, and their incomes were higher," according to Georgia Department of Corrections website (n.d.)

#### *Educational services in Georgia state prisons*

Georgia state prisons supported about 85 GDC sites to help the prisoners who have a middle school diploma when entering a prison, to complete a high school diploma or GED. Academic education contains one to three studying the courses, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). Additionally, all state and private prisons, Probation Detention Centers, Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Centers, and most Transitional Centers offer prison educational programs, which are optional, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). Following are some examples of special education courses:

1. General Education Diploma Preparation which includes two types of GED, first is GED prep and the second is GED fast-track, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). GED prep is a post-secondary program. More details, every year, Georgia prisons are administrating about 3,000 GED examinations, with a 70% passing average. GED staff could work full or part time. In addition, colleges course and technical colleges (post-secondary) are provided, which required the student who has the approval to pay all the tuitions. Next, GED fast-track is a program provided to the prisoner who has a higher reading and math levels. This program could expand from 10 to 12 weeks. GED fast-track started at medium security prisons such as Lee Arrendale, Johnson, and Washington State Prisons, in July 2014, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). Furthermore, by successfully managing criminals and providing opportunities for positive transformation, the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) contributes to a safer Georgia. GDC oversees roughly 52,000 state prisoners in 33 state prisons, 23 county prisons, and four private prisons, making it one of the largest prison systems in the country. It is the most powerful law enforcement agency in the country (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).

### Charter High School Program (HS diploma)

2. Statistically, there are 7 of 10 prisoners who do not finish a high school diploma, so Charter school programs give them the opportunity to complete their education and get the degree, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). Initially, in January 2015, Lee Arrendale State Prison collaborated with the Mountain Education Charter School to provide classes for the female prisoner. Extension plans will give the opportunity for male prisoners to get a high school diploma at Burruss Correctional Training Center, Partnership with Foothills Education Charter School, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).

3. Georgia prisons also provide (a) ESL programs for the prisoner to improve their level of English. Georgia prisons provide (b) Literacy/Remedial Reading (LRR) program, for those functioning below the fifth-grade reading level. The Special education program is for those with learning handicaps, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.), (c) General Education

which includes literacy and math instruction, (d) Adult Basic Education (ABE), is for offenders functioning between the fifth-grade level and eighth-grade level. Finally, they also provide (e) correspondence courses, (f) classes for offenders under the age of 21, and (g) Braille reading, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).

### *How does the Department of Corrections determine who needs literacy services?*

Anyone who does not have a high school diploma, or a General Education Diploma (GED) may be eligible to participate in the Academic Education program, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.). Certificates are given out at the end of each course. After passing the GED exams, you will receive your GED. Pardons, Parole, Pre-Release Stipulations, Short Sentences of 4 years or less, Pre-Release centers of 2 years or less, and sentences of more than 4 years are the enrollment priority. All qualified offenders are expected to complete an academic education, and classes are available at all prisons, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).

### *Tables and facts about the Education services/programs and prisoners' number in Georgia state prisons*

According to Georgia Department of Corrections website (n.d.) that nearly 55,000 felony inmates are sentenced to some type of incarceration. Georgia, in fact, has the country's fourth-largest jail population. Below is some specific statistics about the level of education among Georgia prison population based on January 2015 Inmate Statistical Profile, (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).

Table 1 above compares the educational degrees between prisoners of N= 3,415 females and N= 47,294 males. By looking at the table over, we can clearly conclude that most of the male prisoners had a middle school diploma or did not finish their high school. Also, the highest level of education of the majority prisoner women is GED or 12th grade. In conclusion, the lower number of education level asserts the necessity of providing prisons educational programs for the offenders. Additionally, Table 2 below represents the number of the prisoner's males and the female who have no degree at all and who already have an elementary school degree.

**Table 1.** Comparing the educational degrees between prisoners

Grade Level	Male	Female	Total
Middle School 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	4,299	344	4,643
High School 9 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	20,467	1,019	21,486
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade or GED	16,863	1,234	18,097
Technical School	527	214	741
1-3 Years of College	3,841	457	4,298
Bachelor s degree	635	96	731
Master s degree	110	21	131
Ph.D. degree	21	4	25
Law degree	24	6	30
Medical degree	14	1	13
Grand Total	47,294	3,415	50,709

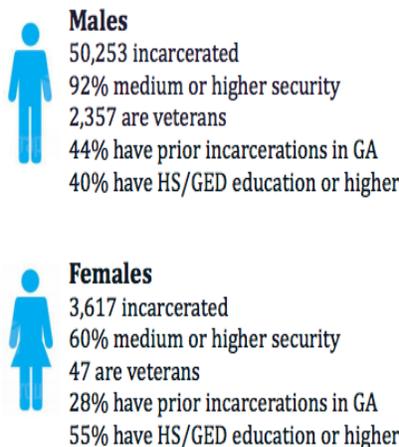
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**Table 2.** The number of the prisoner's males and the female with no degree at all and those with an elementary school degree

Grade Level	Male	Female	Total
No School	12	0	12
Elementary School 1st-5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	481	19	500

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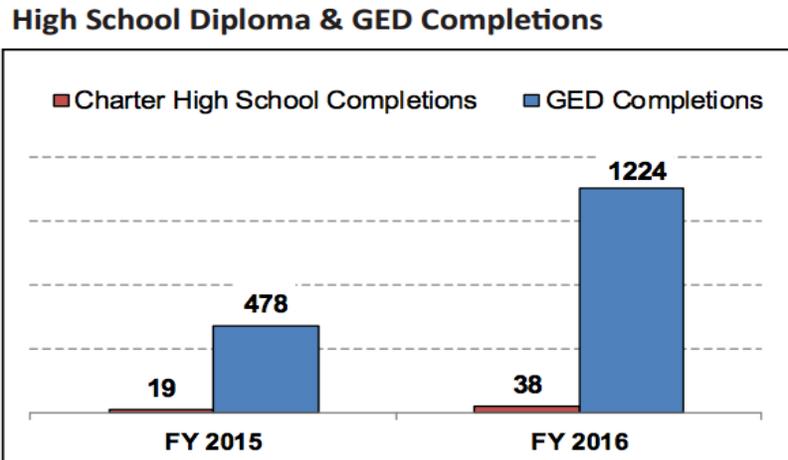
**Inmate Population Gender Breakdown**  
(as of 2015)



*The number of prisoners who use educational services/programs in a year*

According to Georgia Department of Corrections website (n.d.) that the average monthly enrollments in the FY fiscal year 2016 were 5,624, an 11% increase over the FY fiscal year 2015 figures. A total of 1,224 GED was completed, topping the goal

of 1,000 by over 18%. Likewise, the Charter School Program allowed 38 offenders to obtain a High School diploma. GDC has two charter school programs: Lee Arrendale State Prison (Alto, GA) and Burruss Correctional Training Center (Forsyth, GA), (Georgia Department of Corrections website, n.d.).



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**Figure 1.** High school diploma and GED completions

*What Correctional Philosophy (New York, Pennsylvania, West, Southern, etc.,) is most closely associated with educational services?*

To answer this question, we need first to give a brief idea about the differences between the Pennsylvania system and the New York or Auburn prison system, (Clear *et al.*, 2012). Both Pennsylvania and Auburn systems had the same basis of the penitentiaries operation which was originated from the Walnut Street Jail. Both systems emphasized the hard work of the inmates during their time in prison, and how they could reform their self, (Clear *et al.*, 2012). In one hand, Pennsylvania system was known as the separate system, because of its system of isolating the prisoner from the other prisoner. Isolation process allows the prisoners to read the Bible and contemplating on what they had done. Pennsylvania system keeps the offenders separate and silent, so they stay disconnected from each other, during eating, sleeping, and working times (Clear *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, New York or Auburn system was known as congregate system, because of its system of allowing the prisoner to eat and work with each other, so they can produce goods to be sold by the state. Likewise, Pennsylvania system, the Auburn system keeps the offenders' separate cells during nighttime, and silent all the time, (Clear *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, it is clear now that the New York or Auburn system is the most closely associated with educational services, because of its rules by

allowing the inmates to work as a group. Isolating the prisoner of the others could cause mental and social issues. Let us imagine that you stop talking and interacting with other people over a long time period, what would happen to you! Moreover, the main and a crucial element of the educational operation is interaction and teamwork.

*Labeling theory in way to explain the issue*

Many theories promote rehabilitating offenders rather than harshly punishing them, such as labeling theory, social control theory, and differential association theory, among others. Local, state, and federal governments backed previous beliefs by funding education, mental health initiatives, drug rehabilitation, and other reforms. Nevertheless, in this research paper, the researcher will review labeling theory and how is the understanding of this theory helps to reduce the stigma toward the prisoners who received educational programs while they are in the prison.

*A. The major concepts used in the theory*

In general, labeling theory is an explanation of criminal or deviant behavior that derived from the sociological theory "symbolic interaction theory", which focused on the social construction such as self-identity, self-concepts, cognitive process, values, and attitudes, acting, reacting - as a process involving interactions with others. In sum, labeling theory is about the way of how the individuals treating, acting, and labeling the others.

Specifically, and according to Akers (2013) "labeling theory focused on the informal and formal application of stigmatizing, deviant "labels" or tags by society on some of its members" (p.99). Labeling theory explains how the acceptable or unacceptable behavior varies in different societies. For instance, what is acceptable in the USA is prohibited in Saudi Arabia such as gambling and drinking alcohol. It is view label as an independent variable when it hypothesizes that negative label would cause the continuation of the criminal behavior.

Following are the major concepts of the labeling theory: **(a)** There are multiple values with varying degrees of overlap characterize society, (Williams & McShane ,2014), **(b)** only the application of values determines the quality of any individual's behavior, a reaction to a deviant behavior that leads to the identification of the behavior as deviant, **(c)** deviance is a characteristic of the reaction rather than the activity itself. There is no divergence if there is a reaction (Williams & McShane, 2014), **(d)** when a social audience labels a behavior as deviant, the person who did it is likewise labeled as deviant, **(e)** when those who are stigmatized are less socially powerful than their audience, the process of reacting and labeling is more likely. As a result, deviation is more typically associated with society's less powerful members (Williams & McShane, 2014), **(f)** reactors (individuals, social groups, and law enforcement agencies) tend to pay closer attention to those they have labeled as deviants, resulting in even more deviation in those individuals. The label is securely applied to subsequent acts, and subsequent acts are reacted to more quickly (Williams & McShane, 2014), **(g)** the audience perceives a person who has been classified as being who the label claims he or she is. A person who has been categorized as a criminal may have other characteristics that are not covered by the term (Williams & McShane, 2014), **(h)** besides "becoming" a deviant for the label as a self-identity, the strength of the individual's original self-concept and the force of the labeling process both influence acceptance of the label, **(I)** a shift in self-perception leads to internalization of the deviant character's characteristics, and **(j)** additional deviant behavior (secondary deviance) is the result of living and acting in the deviant label's position, frequently as part of a deviant subculture (Williams & McShane , 2014).

### *B. The insights that have been derived from the application of the theory to a contemporary criminological issue*

Thus, since we understand how and why the society would label the deviant, we can suggest programs that would help the released prisoners to not be stigmatized. In one hand, education programs, for example, are an effective way to help the prisoner finding a job and improving their economic status. The importance of the educational programs lies in the idea of educated prisoners who are more likely to be trusted than ignorant. Indeed, and honestly, it will be hard for the society to accept the criminals after being released, but the people should give them a chance to develop their self. On the other hand, we also need to promote the awareness in society about how to treat the ex-prisoner in the way to reduce the stigma by organizing purposeful campaigns, enhancing the positive thinking through the social media, and providing educational TV shows. Because of the stigma, the released criminal could probably be back to the criminal path. The society should know that how harsh it is to be stigmatized, while you were waiting for forgiveness. The society should stop blaming the released prisoners because of their past and start treating them as new individuals. Additionally, the employers and policymakers should know that the prisoners how completed their education in prison should be treated as students as they at school and give them the opportunity to get the appropriate job. Finally, the responsibility of rehabilitation and reduce the recidivism are shared by the family, government, local community, formal and informal social regulation, and corrections system.

### **The assessment of the empirical article**

#### *A. The premise of the article*

Illiterate people are more likely to commit the crime and as we reviewed earlier in this paper that the majority of the incarcerated have a middle school degree. Actually, correctional education programs are provided to reduce the recidivism or re-entry, even though, the researcher believed that there are factors or reasons that make some prisoners successfully reintegrating into their community and the other not. As a result, the researcher attempted to assess the efficacy of correctional education programs to determine whether the nation's

investment in prisoner education is yielding the desired results, as well as whether the correctional education programs are effective.

### *B. The methodological approach*

The meta-analysis method was used to bring the conclusions for this investigation. Meta-analysis is a statistical analysis of numerous separate but similar experiments or research to determine statistical significance of the pooled data. The researcher searched the literature for published and unpublished studies that looked at the association between correctional education involvement and inmate outcomes between 1980 and 2011. The impacts of correctional education programs provided to adults have been synthesized using meta-analytic techniques across many research studies. However, the researcher looked at whether participating in correctional education programs was linked to increased labor force involvement and whether a correctional education program with a computer-assisted instructional component was linked to improved accomplishment test results. In addition, to put the recidivism findings into context, the researcher ran a cost study comparing the direct costs of correctional education to the direct costs of re-incarceration.

### *C. The data set used and listing of the statistics used in the analysis*

The research paper has listed many tables and dataset, but we will choose just two tables related to our topic as a correctional education program and how it helps reduce the recidivism.

#### *1- The risk differences and number needed to treat based on different recidivism base rates*

Table 3 below has shown the number of inmates who rearrested and reincarcerated within three years after they have been released, from 2002-2011. The results show a positive average effect of correctional educational programs across studies such as GED preparation, and vocational training. Obviously, the number of recidivisms has been decreased within the three years, especially for those who have been participating in the correctional education programs. These outcomes are prominent evidence of the hard work and collaborated efforts that have been accomplished by the operators and makers of the correctional education programs.

**Table 3.** The number of inmates who rearrested and reincarcerated within three years, Risk difference and number needed to treat based on different recidivism base rates.

Recidivism Base Rate Source	Recidivism Base Rate Definition	Recidivism Base Rate	Estimated Recidivism Rate for Correctional Education Participants	Risk Difference	Number Needed To Treat
P. A. langan and D. J. levin, recidivism of prisoners released in 1994, NCJ 193427, 2002	Rearrest within 3 years of release	67.5	54.3	13.2	8
P. A. langan and D. J. levin, recidivism of prisoners released in 1994, NCJ 193427, 2002	Reincarceration within 3 years of release	51.8	38.0		7
Pew center on the states, stste of recidivism: the revolving Door of American prisons, Washington, D.C. pew charitable trusts, 2011	Reincarceration within 3 years of release	43.3	30.4		8

2- Estimates of the effects of the correctional educational participation on the odd of recidivism, by programs type

Table 4 below shows the calculations of odds ratios for four types of correctional education programs, (a) adult basic education (ABE), (b) high school or GED, (c) post-secondary education, and (d) vocational education programs. The results imply that there is a correlation between recidivism reduction and participated in correctional education

programs. The researcher did mention that various programs are functioning differently, based upon the prisoner’s needs and skills. For instance, ABE programs are provided for those prisoners who have low levels of academic achievement such as 8th grade and less. Post-secondary education programs are provided for those who have advanced levels of education such as 8th grade and more. Finally, the most provided program for the majority of the prisoners is GED or high school.

**Table 4.** Calculations of odds ratios for four types of correctional education programs Estimates of the effect of correctional education participation on the odds of recidivating, by program type

Program type	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	n	k
Adult basic education	0.67*	0.57 to 0.79	13	19
High school/GED	0.70*	0.64 to 0.77	22	28
Postsecondary education	0.49*	0.39 to 0.60	19	24
Vocational education	0.64*	0.58 to 0.72	34	42

\*p<0.05.

NOTE: n is the number of studies and K is the number of effect size estimates.

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**Conclusion**

The previously presented results are significantly encouraging. Anyway, the results stated above have positively approved that correctional education programs have played significant roles to decrease post-release recidivism with effective, affordable cost. The study observed that correctional education programs might increase in labor force participation, too. The study asserted the needs of the high-quality studies which would be important to improve the correctional educational programs to be more efficient and more beneficial. According to the findings, correctional education programs assist ex-prisoners in resuming their lives after release, hence assisting the nation's overall growth. In other words, it assists them in getting back on their feet and staying on their feet when they return to their communities.

**Policy implications**

The research indicated that one of the essences focus of policymakers and practitioners in the correctional education area is to develop, design, and deliver programs in a way to achieve the most benefit. The goal of the study was to help guide judgments regarding program qualities and

determine whether certain program characteristics were linked to recidivism or re-entry decrease.

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