

IN & OUT – COMPARING STRATEGIES OF PRISON EDUCATION IN BELGIUM, SPAIN AND TURKEY

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Abstract

Comparing the strategies of prison education in Belgium, Spain and Turkey, this study investigated the organisational, philosophical and historical development of courses for inmates in penitentiaries, the relationship of the educational institutions with the Department of Justice in each of the three nations, and conditions which have contributed to successful implementation of the concept. Data came from a literature survey, experiences of the participating institutions and other stakeholders as well as from the author's participation in other Grundtvig projects. These were among the conclusions: (1) prison education courses have been, and remain, quite flexible and the idea has been adapted to the needs of each nation; (2) In Spain the academic evaluation might influence the course of the prison sentence where this has no effect in Belgium and Turkey; (3) Each country has a different set of instruments for educational motivation of inmates.

Keywords: Prison education, Grundtvig, development of courses.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The initiative – background and context

Prison education is not a new phenomenon but the pace of its global expansion is. It is this growth that brings with it increasing levels of expertise both within and between countries. Many formal and informal educational organisations now are active in one or more penitential facilities, offering courses for the inmates. This growth of prison education has implications not just for individual institutions of adult education but for nation states, international organisations and inmates. Put simply, the advent of new education providers in prisons poses significant challenges to all the stakeholders.

Currently, prison education is an under-researched and often misunderstood area, with few common understanding, definition or approach. It has many different manifestations, some of which are alternately regarded as threats or benefits by different national education systems and even, by various parts of society.

The purpose of this study is to draw together existing work in this area, refine the typology, research the current situation across Europe and comparing the strategies in Belgium, Spain and Turkey.

The background for this work was a former Grundtvig project "Little stories, great hopes" (2008) where several European organisations exchanged their expertise in autobiographical writing by inmates. This project delivered a set of writing exercises for prisoners and became the Grundtvig Award 2010 winner on the annual Conference of the European Association for the Educations of Adults (EAEA)¹⁹. This led to the application of a new Grundtvig project "In & Out" (2011) where three institutions of Belgium, Spain and Turkey have exchanged their methodologies in education of detainees.

Prison education is complex. Firstly, by the way it links to the special population of adult learners to learning new skills and secondly, by the way it impacts on a number of related areas of the inmates including the reflection on their own life and finding new perspectives or opportunities for their future.

The building of the EAEA as a European prison education platform is based on the vision of a common architecture of in this field of adult education. It is designed to enhance Europe's national education systems whilst promoting their cultural diversity, quality and competitiveness. The specific programs need to be more efficient, flexible and become more attractive to European and non-European inmates.

1.2 Project aims and terms of reference

1.2.1 Project aims

The project was established to analyse and make recommendations on the development and impact (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of prison education in Belgium, Spain and Turkey.

Specifically, this report seeks to make a comparative analyses in the fields of:

- Inmate evaluation;
- Academic evaluation;
- Educational areas in prison;
- Penitentiary instruments used by the prison for educational motivation;
- Integration with the ordinary educational institutes outside the prisons;
- Prison benefits;
- Evaluation and control.

1.2.2 Terms of reference

According to international conventions and recommendations the offender has the same right to education as other citizens¹⁴. Offenders have a range of complex needs and reasons for their offending behaviour. Many have education and skills deficits and therefore the provision of learning opportunities is considered to be an important way of increasing their reintegration and inclusion in society. It is also anticipated that “filling the gap” can help in the prevention of further development of a criminal career.

Prison education and training is a cross-cutting theme, of relevance not only to lifelong learning policy but also to the areas of employment and social affairs, justice, freedom and security. This study focuses on relevant policy developments in three European countries within the area of education and training, which will be described in the main body of the document.

European Framework for Education and Training

While policies for education and training continue to be developed at Member State level, European actions have helped to encourage greater cooperation and collaboration. Most recently, the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training set out four long-term strategic objectives for Member States:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

This study demonstrates how the four objectives are relevant to prison education and training. Specific developments at Member State level, as well as projects supported by EU funding, help to achieve these aims in the context of prison education and training. The developments identified for this study include policies and initiatives to support and / or improve the quality of lifelong learning in prisons, to enable and empower offenders to access their right to education and training, and to support offenders to develop knowledge, skills and competences, from basic skills to creativity, to facilitate their rehabilitation.

Key Competences: Literacy and basic skills, personal and social competences

At European level, there is a clear commitment to ensuring that all European citizens have the key competences they need to access employment and achieve personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship. The European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning¹⁶ identifies the key skills individuals require and is made up of competences in ‘traditional’ subjects (e.g. mother tongue literacy, numeracy, knowledge of foreign languages, science and ICT skills) and also other ‘softer’ skills, such as learning to learn, social and civic competence, taking initiative, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and self-expression. Member States are encouraged to use the Framework to develop the provision of key competences as part of their lifelong learning strategies.

Furthermore, the 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning includes a specific objective on raising the skills levels of European citizens, and supporting them to go 'one step up' (to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before). The Action Plan also states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their level of qualification and integrate better in all aspects of life.

While there is currently no robust evidence to suggest that a lack of basic skills (literacy, language and numeracy) is predictive of offending, it is true that a large proportion of those in prison have low levels of qualifications and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Likewise, there is no evidence linking specific learning difficulties to offending, but impaired basic skills are related to a number of other factors which can be associated with offending, including poor school experience, unemployment, social exclusion and various psychological or cognitive factors linked to self-concept and attitudes to offending²⁹. It is also indicated that offenders with impaired basic skills are even more motivated to increase their competence levels during incarceration³⁰. Nevertheless, there is research to suggest that basic skills training can improve prisoners' skills, although whether this training alone can have a positive impact on employment is questioned³¹. There is however some evidence to show that basic skills learning can contribute to a reduction in re-offending³² and there is evidence that low skills are a major barrier to employment prospects, no matter what other disadvantages an individual faces. It has also been argued that a modern society and today's labour market require higher levels of basic skills compared to the production labour of earlier societies, and members of the community with lower skills and competence levels are therefore more vulnerable to changes in the labour market.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Establishing the project

Following an initial meeting in Belgium on the 9th October 2011. One project rapporteurs of each partner were appointed who were responsible for conducting the national research. One of the three was designated 'general rapporteur'. The countries included in the projects were responsible for obtaining national information on the field of Inmate evaluation, Academic evaluation, Educational areas in prison, Penitentiary instruments used by the prison for educational motivation, Integration with the ordinary educational institutes outside the prisons, Prison benefits and Evaluation and control.

They reported their findings to the general rapporteur who was responsible for producing the final integrated report.

The initial mapping exercises on the regional situations in the three countries were aided by the use of a individual partner findings that were then integrated into the final report. The mapping exercise gained enough reliable information to generate a general picture of the current state of prison education in the region. Mapping was undertaken on a national basis and a range of European states was surveyed. Information was also gained from a number of international organisations.

2.2 Time-scales

The project extended from October 2011 to June 2013. It took the following stages:

- October 2011 - initial project meeting;
- November 2011 - project specification finalised;
- January - May 2012 (inclusive) - the national information gathering exercise;
- September - December 2012 (inclusive)- analysis and production of the draft report and recommendations;
- January - May 2013 (inclusive) Steering Group meeting to finalise the report and recommendations;
- June 2013 - Project finalised;
- June 2013 - Report presented at EDULEARN2013 Barcelona, Spain;
- July 2013 - Publication of project.

2.3 Organisation and approach to the research

The remit of this project was to explore the current and future impact of prison education in Belgium, Spain and Turkey within the European Union. The project maps, by country and the on-site visits in all the participating countries give the participants a clear view of the situation on the ground. Following the mapping exercise the patterns and impacts of prison education where across Europe were explored by a literature study. This initial research then formed the basis for the rest of the project.

The next stage involved the identification of the main factors determining the supply and demand of prison education, together with its probable future pattern of growth in Europe. The nature of the evolving European education market then formed the background for evaluating the effectiveness of existing regional and national approaches to prison education.

Finally, the research identified 'good practice' associated with the conduct, control and alternative ways to accommodate the implications of prison education on several European conferences. The resulting identification of potential and actual problems associated with prison education then formed the basis of the recommendations to policy makers.

3 RESULTS

The following sheet is the result of the survey in the three participating organisations. The respondents were asked to reflect upon prison education from their national perspectives. It must be stressed that most responses represent the personal views of the individuals concerned and not official positions held by their organisations.

Table 3.1. Comparative analyses on 7 fields of prison education

FIELDS	SPAIN (CEUTA)	TURKEY (ISKENDERUN)	BELGIUM (TURNHOUT)
Inmate Evaluation	From day one. The evaluation is done from a multidisciplinary perspective beginning at the very first day of the entrance in prison.	The compulsory attendance of the detainees is asked so from the first day the evaluation starts.	From day one. The evaluation is done from a multidisciplinary perspective beginning at the very first day of the entrance in prison.
Academic Evaluation	Teachers set the standards, participating their evaluation to other professionals in prison. The academic evaluation might influence the course of the prison sentence.	Academic evaluation is done up to the vocational standards that the ministry of education of has specified. Courses have modules and each module has a standard scale for evaluation.	Academic evaluation and certification is done by the school, in the same way as outside prison. The academic evaluation doesn't influence the course of the prison sentence.
Educational areas in prison	Specific areas for education and professional training Specific living units for inmates involved in any sort of academic course. Specific office for teachers in the prison.	The courses are given in the classrooms and workshops inside the prison. The courses are given both in the closed prison and semi-open prison. Painting, Kitchen maid, Service commies, Plumbing , Xylography, Barbering, Welding, Furniture, Led lighting, Tiling, ICT, literature courses.	Languages ICT-courses Vocational education (ex industrial painter) Cooking.

Table 3.1. Comparative analyses on 7 fields of prison education

FIELDS	SPAIN (CEUTA)	TURKEY (ISKENDERUN)	BELGIUM (TURNHOUT)
Penitentiary instruments used by the Prison for educational motivation	Prison benefits, decided at the Prison Board, the basics include: honorific mentions, academic material, monetary grants, placement in specific units, depending on the sentence prison leaves.	The detainees who exhibit positive attitude during the courses may be sent to semi-open prison. Monetary grants.	Small monetary grants. Honorific mentions.
Integration with the ordinary educational institute outside	The link with the academic institute outside is strength from the first day of imprisonment. Once outside the link is maintained. No academic fees for those dependants on the Prison.	The courses are opened up to the protocol between the two ministries. On the local base the courses are opened by the courtesy of the governor of the district. The institution is responsible for the whole evaluation and certification.	The CVO is responsible for evaluation and certification inside and outside prison.
Prison benefits	Third degree status - staying in prison only at night -, telematic surveillance - being controlled at home not in prison-, shortening the sentence – probation.	The courses have positive effect on the peace in the prison as the detainees are busy with doing something they are interested. Monetary effects; Detainees learn, produce and earn in the upstream courses opened within circulating capital.	None.
Evaluation and Control	Control continues after leaving prison by the Prison Social Services until the sentence is definitely cleared. The education or professional evolution is controlled at least once every three months. Teachers reports are considered.	The evaluations of the courses are done by the teachers. The security is provided by the prison authority.	Evaluation and control of the educational prison programs are done by the Flemish Department of education.

Despite strenuous efforts to gather reliable information, research of this type always suffers from incomplete data. Nevertheless, sufficient was gained to give a reasonably accurate picture of increasing prison education activity and multiplying problems. A simple net-search provides corroborative evidence of this.

Across Europe, it is not surprising that very different situations exist with regard to prison education. The pattern of provision varies considerably from country to country and the challenges consequently impact in different ways. It is clear from the evidence of this study and other reports that countries with highly protected state education sectors, that do not meet the current inmate demand, experience more problems with the flexible modular prison education programs.

4 DISCUSSION - THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF “IN & OUT” ON PRISON EDUCATION IN THE EU

In the short-term, the potential impact of prison education is likely to stay as it is now-of medium scale and significance. Its effect varies in terms of geographical area, academic sector and types of education systems. Currently, its impact is not uniform and this is unlikely to change. However, in the longer term, strong circumstantial evidence suggests that its impact will intensify and broaden. Virtually every response from those contacted foresaw large-scale future growth. New national and international initiatives are continually being announced.

4.1 Positive aspects

The main positive aspects of prison education in the participating countries were reported as follows. They were all ranked with roughly equal overall importance. Prison education:

- widens learning opportunities by providing more choice for inmates;
- challenges traditional education systems by introducing more innovative programmes and delivery methods;
- helps to prepare the inmates for live after imprisonment;

4.2 Negative aspects

The main negative aspects of prison education were identified as follows.

- problems associated with non-official, unregulated adult education providers (often franchise institutions and branch campuses) who remain outside official national quality assurance regimes and are not subject to internal or external audit/monitoring processes;
- inmates protection problems associated with lack of adequate information (and therefore transparency) available to the potential candidates;

5 CONCLUSION

Prison education relates to all dimensions of current educational debates. It affects recognition, accreditation, cultural autonomy and transparency of educational programs. The most significant findings of this project are:

- prison education courses have been, and remain, quite flexible and the idea has been adapted to the needs of each nation;
- In Spain the academic evaluation might influence the course of the prison sentence where this has no effect in Belgium and Turkey;
- Each country has a different set of instruments for educational motivation of inmates.

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