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Prison Inmates’ Educational Motives: Are They Pushed or Pulled?

Terje Manger, Ole-Johan Eikeland, Åge Diseth, Hilde Hetland, and Arve Asbjørnsen
University of Bergen

The aim of the present study was to examine inmates’ educational motives. The participants were 467 inmates who attended education in Norwegian prisons. Three motive categories were identified: “To prepare for life upon release” (Factor 1), “social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context” (Factor 2), and “to acquire knowledge and skills” (Factor 3). Factor 1 explained more of the variance than the sum of the other factors, and educational level was not related to scores on this first factor. Inmates with long sentences were more likely than those with short sentences to start an education in prison to prepare for life upon release. Inmates with low education scored significantly higher on Factor 2 than those with high education, but significantly lower on Factor 3 than the latter group.

Keywords: inmates, educational motives, push-pull dimension

Introduction

According to the common interpretation of the educational law in Norway, prison inmates should have the same access to education as other citizens. The law prescribes 10 years of primary education and 3–5 years of secondary education. Prisons in Norway have adopted the so-called import model for delivery of services to the prison inmates. From this it follows that the normal school system will supply educational services in prison. However, a recent educational and policy concern has been the low educational attainment among inmates, especially the youngest offenders (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2005). At the same time, studies also reveal that more than half of the inmates wish to start formal education (e.g., Hetland, Eikeland, Manger, Diseth, & Asbjørnsen, 2007; Manger, Eikeland, Asbjørnsen, & Langelid, 2006). Other studies (e.g., Costelloe, 2003; Forster, 1990) show that inmates’ motives to begin an education differ from the corresponding...
motives in the general population, and that there is a need to increase understanding of the impact of the prison context on educational motives.

According to Forster (1990) the initial impetus to join an educational activity in prison seems to be tied up with instructional considerations that apply only rarely outside a prison context. Some types of impetus may be regarded as “negative”: Education is seldom seen as attractive in itself, but inmates may take up education to avoid other alternatives, such as prison work. Likewise, Skaalvik, Finbak, and Pettersen (2003) identified one broad category of inmates who started education to avoid aspects of prison life rather than seek out education as an activity in itself. Inmates in another broad category were much more concerned with the value of education, their own resettlement, and future job prospects. There is, however, a need for more research on the extent to which inmates’ educational behavior is a product of intentional choice, rooted in external or internal reasons, in contrast to processes in which individual decisions are of less importance. The results can increase our understanding of how to adapt the educational programs to different needs and different categories of inmates. Such information is relevant to policy making, service development, planning and deployment of resources, and teaching. The present study, which includes all inmates in all Norwegian prisons, represents the first comprehensive estimate of the educational motives within the prison population of Norway.

The Push-Pull Dimension in Educational Sociology

The push-pull dimension of motivation, developed most explicitly within the sociology of education, has been used to explain individual decisions in education (e.g., Elster, 1979; Gambetta, 1987) and also inmates’ motives to start an education (Costelloe, 2003; Forster, 1990). According to “the pushed-from-behind” view educational behavior follows from causes, social or psychological, that are not products of the individuals’ consciousness. The causes, by acting behind the pawns’ backs, push them toward a given course of action. Likewise, according to research on prison education the push factors involve forces that act to drive inmates away from something (e.g., prison work or discipline). In contrast, “the pulled-from-the-front” view assumes that individuals act purposely in accordance with their intentions. Faced with multiple options, they will weigh them and choose according to anticipated future rewards (e.g., a good job). The pull model also suggests that students’ attraction to studying (learning for the sake of learning) will strongly influence their decisions (Gambetta, 1987). Future concerns and a possible job on release, or interest for a subject, may draw inmates toward education.

Gambetta (1987) takes the theoretical stance that it is insufficient to discount people’s reasons for actions, as does the pushed-from-behind view. He assumes that pushing factors can be quite important for the individual upon the formation of preferences, although he thinks it is unlikely that they will single out directly the course of education to be taken. On the other hand, he claims that it is overly optimistic to think that all relevant educational behavior takes place within an arena of freedom, or that the educational motives are always transparent to the individuals’ consciousness: “…having a structure of preferences and acting accordingly does not necessarily mean being aware of how this structure has come about” (p. 29). This theoretical stance is in line with Reeve’s (2005) suggestion that individuals’ needs, which generate motivational states, are sometimes silent, or at least somewhere on the back burner of consciousness. According to Gambetta, pushing factors that may be at work can be norms, traditions, class values, and structural constraints.
assumes that if people cannot find the motivation within themselves, then perhaps the threat of an aversive consequence will give them the motivation they lack.

The push-pull dimension in educational sociology is concerned with the degree of intention in educational choices. In psychology, the terminology is whether individuals generate their motivation internally or externally. Motivation is often conceptualized as two ends of a continuum (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation involves a desire to engage in an activity for no obvious reward except task engagement itself (Deci, 1975). In extrinsic motivation a person may start an education not because he shows high interest, but because he wants to obtain rewards or avoid punishment. In psychological terms, the pulled-from-the-front view indicates that much of the actual person is participating in the decisions, which can include motives generated from intrinsic motivation, such as engaging in an activity for its own sake. However, this view can also include extrinsic motives, such as to engage in an activity as a means to an end (e.g., a future job that can improve the quality of life). The pushed-from-behind view means less active participation from the individual and may be used to describe persons who have motives that are means to an end, but not generated from interest, a desire to learn, or a clear future goal.

Intrinsic and extrinsic tendencies can also be considered as two independent opportunities and, at any given time, one can be motivated by some of each (Covington & Mueller, 2001). In the case of educational decisions a person can, for example, at the same time be motivated by a desire to learn and a desire to gain a future reward by starting an education. Either the intrinsic or the extrinsic motivation may, however, dominate in certain time periods.

Inmates’ Motives

A former study (Diseth, Eikeland, Manger, & Hetland, 2008) showed that inmates under education in Norwegian prisons are reasonably well motivated. However, the study did not aim to classify inmates’ motives. In her study of third level students in prisons in Ireland, Costelloe (2003) classified motivation into the two distinct and broad categories identifiable with push and pull factors. She found that many of the motives in both these groups of factors were unique to the prison context and “can be recognized as emerging from a need to get away from mind-numbing prison life (push factors), or alternatively, to prepare for life upon release (pull factors)” (p. 131). Among Parson and Lagerback’s (1993) four underlying factors of motivation for prison education students, there are also motives unique to the corrections setting, especially participation in order to avoid a negative stimulus, but also participation in order to be around others, or simply to “do something.” The other motive factors identified in their study were called cognitive control, which is learning for the sake of learning (intrinsic motivation), and goal orientation, where participation is seen as a means to a particular end (extrinsic motivation). These are motives that can also be applied to more general educational settings.

Both Costelloe (2003) and Forster (1990) found that the previously educationally disadvantaged inmates were motivated more by attempts to break free from prison routines, rather than by actively seeking education itself. In contrast, the initial motivations of the previously well qualified inmates were positive from the start; they used the opportunities to upgrade their qualifications while in prison. They were influenced by such factors as the value that education has upon release and resettlement in the society. Various extrinsic factors that could improve quality of life seemed to be the driving forces for these students.
Variables that may Influence Inmates’ Motives

The inmates vary due to gender, age, length of incarceration, and citizenship. These are variables that may influence and differentiate educational motives in prison. However, at the time of writing of the present paper, a search in the databases Eric and PsychINFO revealed no studies of these variables’ influence on inmates’ educational motives. Significant gender differences favoring females are found in studies of reading and writing difficulties among inmates (Manger et al., 2006) and in studies of educational level (Eikeland & Manger, 2004). Thus, gender may well be pertinent to educational motives.

Young and old inmates may be motivated by the same reasons to take education in prison, but the emphasis on the motives may differ. While young inmates, with less completed education than older ones, may see the incarceration period as a good chance in life to resume and complete education, older inmates may become interested in prison education because it makes prison life easier and less boring. Likewise, inmates with considerable previous completed education may also see education in prison as a better way to manage prison life and at the same time point them toward particular destinations, such as learning for the sake of learning.

Studies have shown that the length of the incarceration period is taken into consideration when inmates decide whether or not to take education in prison (Eikeland, Manger, & Asbjørnsen, 2009). Inmates with short sentences find it less worthwhile to start an education compared to those with longer sentences. An important reason may be that they perceive education in traditional “school terms,” and do not see that education can incorporate shorter courses or an opportunity to continue education after release. Another important reason is that the educational programs in several prisons are not planned for those with shorter sentences.

Every seventh inmate in the Norwegian prison population has non-Norwegian citizenship. These inmates vary in the degree to which they have completed education (Eikeland, Manger, & Diseth, 2006). A higher percentage of inmates from regions outside the Nordic countries and Europe have not completed basic education. Generally they have less education than others. Youth and lack of prior education may be factors that motivate some inmates to take an education in prison, while language problems, cultural distance, and lack of basic education and knowledge can hinder participation in prison education.

Research Problems

Most of the findings summarized above indicate that educational decisions among prison inmates are based on a complex set of factors. Within the push-pull dimension there are indicators of various extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. In the present study our aim was to examine factors influencing choice of education in prison. Are inmates driven by factors apart from education itself, or do they seek education as an activity that is itself attractive? Is it attractive because of extrinsic rewards education can provide them with or because of interest in the subjects? In line with the literature summarized, we assumed that educationally disadvantaged inmates (e.g., those who have not completed compulsory school or upper secondary school) are more likely to be motivated by push factors, while educationally advanced inmates (e.g., those who have completed upper secondary school or higher education) more often are influenced by pull factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic that can improve the quality of life after release. Further, inmates’ gender, age, citizenship, and time of incarceration may influence their motives for taking up an education in prison, and variables such as time of
incarceration, level of education, and citizenship may interact by age when analyzing educational motives. The present literature base is too meagre to form hypotheses about the possible direction of the influence of these variables on educational motives. However, one can assume that females, younger inmates, and those with long sentences are more likely than men, older inmates, and inmates with short sentences, respectively, to start education in prison. Young people may see better chances to succeed in life when education is completed, and it is normally easier to complete education early in life. Later, people may see age as a hindrance, and also feel that (more) education is unnecessary or not worth the effort. The inmates’ age when education is seen as unnecessary or not worthwhile, may differ according to the level of education the person already has completed. It may also differ according to citizenship, while some elderly inmates from educational disadvantageous cultures may see the Norwegian prison education system as a first opportunity to get an education.

Methods

Participants

The participants were part of a target group that included all 3,289 inmates over 18 years of age in Norwegian prisons. They were contacted between February 2 and February 9 2006 (only nine inmates were under 18 years of age). For several reasons (e.g., illness, temporary leave, presence in court) 117 inmates were not included (thus 3,172 were finally addressed). Of these, 2,255 inmates in 42 prisons, or 71.1% of those who received the survey, responded. For the present article the 467 inmates among the respondents who attended education while in prison were included.

Of the participants, 94% were men. According to government figures at the week of data collection, 95.3% of all inmates in Norwegian prisons were men. Of the respondents, 85.7% were Norwegian citizens and 14.3% were foreign citizens, representing 67 countries. Moreover, 84.1% had spent most of their childhood and teenage years in Norway, while 15.9% had spent most of their childhood and teenage years in another country. The mean age of the inmates in the study was 35 years.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the inmates contained several questions directed to educational background and educational motives. The part of the survey that contained formal educational background listed 15 options that could be categorized into: (1) have not completed any education (one option), (2) have completed compulsory school (four options, which covered primary school and lower secondary school in past and present school system), (3) have completed upper secondary school (eight options, which covered general theoretical education, vocational training/subjects or commercial/clerical subjects in past and present school system), (4) have completed single courses at university or other higher education (one option), and (5) have completed degree from university or other higher education (one option). The questionnaire also contained questions about age, sex, citizenship, and time of incarceration.

Of particular interest was an educational motives questionnaire developed by Skaalvik et al. (2003). The inmates were presented with 15 possible reasons for starting an educational program in prison. They were asked to indicate how important each of these reasons was for their starting the educational program in which they were now participating. Some of the motivational items refer to push factors (e.g., “Because it is better than working in
prison” or “To make serving time easier”), other items refer to pull factors (e.g., “To satisfy my desire to learn” or “To make it easier to get a job after I’m released”). Each item had three response categories (“not important,” “somewhat important,” and “very important,” coded 1 to 3). For the questions included in the present paper, respondents were asked to tick the appropriate box or boxes. The questionnaire was available in both Norwegian and English, and one earlier version was tested in a pilot among inmates in one large prison.

Procedure

A person representing the County Governor (Province Governor) of Hordaland, Department of Education (the organization is in charge of Norwegian prison education, serving the Ministry of Education), telephoned each prison governor and each headmaster in charge of prison education, in order to outline the purpose of the study and to arrange for the assessment to be carried out. In addition, a letter was sent to the same persons, explaining the procedures. In line with instructions from the research group, the prison governor of each prison or the teacher in charge of education carried out the survey.

The front page of the questionnaire explained the purpose and procedure, and emphasized that participation was voluntary. Inmates were assured that the results would be confidential and that no specific feedback on their answers would be provided. Inmates with reading and writing problems, or who were not fluent in English or Norwegian, were offered assistance by prison teachers or prison officers in completing the questionnaire. The survey was registered at the Norwegian Data Inspectorate in accordance with Norwegian law.

Results

The 15 items of the educational motive questionnaire were factor analyzed, using principal axis factoring analysis for the extraction of factors and oblique factor rotation. While principal component analysis and varimax rotation are often chosen as a data reduction technique, principal axis factoring and oblique rotation is generally the best option for producing a factor structure (Russel, 2002). This procedure allows for correlated factors, which is often a more accurate description of the data, although this may also give a more complex interpretation of the factor solution. The eigenvalue above one criterion produced three factors, which accounted for 48.6% of the variance. These factors were labeled “to prepare for life upon release” (Factor 1), “social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context” (Factor 2), and “to acquire knowledge and skills” (Factor 3). The factors had eigenvalues of 3.8 (Factor 1), 2.1 (Factor 2), and 1.4 (Factor 3), and they accounted for 25.6, 13.7, and 9.3% of the variance, respectively. While the eigenvalue above one criterion should not be trusted alone (cf. Cooper, 2002), additional evidence in terms of visual inspection of the scree plot (Cattell, 1966) showed a marked change of slope (cf. Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) after the third factor, in accordance with theoretical assumptions (Skaalvik et al., 2003). The eigenvalue of the fourth factor was just slightly below 1.

According to the guidelines for identifying significant factor loadings based on sample size (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995), six items (variables) were considered in the interpretation of each of the two first factors and three items were considered in the interpretation of the third factor. Table 1 shows the items considered and their loadings on the three factors.

The analysis of the factor correlations yielded positive correlations between Factor 1 and Factor 2 ($r = .25$), Factor 1 and Factor 3 ($r = .31$), and Factor 2 and Factor 3 ($r = .19$).
Three indices were computed by adding inmates’ scores on the items that loaded significantly high on each of the factors, divided by the number of items included in each factor. This gave an average score of between 1 (“not important”) and 3 (“very important”)—equivalent to the original values of the items included. The correlations between these indices (sum of the items that loaded significantly high on each factor) were .29 (Factor 1 and Factor 2), .41 (Factor 1 and Factor 3), and .21 (Factor 2 and Factor 3), respectively, as shown in Table 2. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for each of the factors were .76 (Factor 1), .71 (Factor 2), and .58 (Factor 3).

Descriptive statistics (Table 3) showed that the skewness and kurtosis values were acceptable (Kline, 2005). Thus, it is appropriate to utilize these variables in subsequent multivariate analyses.

### Table 1
**Oblique Rotated Factor Loadings From the Principal Axis Factor Analysis (n = 467)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be better able to cope with life after release</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make it easier to avoid committing crime</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make it easier to get a job after release</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pass exams or improve a previous grade</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my self-esteem</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make this educational program a bridge to more education after release</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I wanted to be part of the social environment at the school</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get more freedom during the day</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I had friends going to school</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make serving time easier</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is better than working in prison</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I was encouraged to do so</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To satisfy my desire to learn</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about a subject</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend my time doing something sensible and useful</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Primary factor loadings italicized.*

### Table 2
**Pearson Correlations Among the Study Variables (n = 467)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration time</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * < .05.
In order to examine how inmates’ age, incarceration time, education level, and citizenship related to the three motive categories, three regression analyses (non-stepwise) were conducted. The indices of the items that loaded significantly high on Factor 1, Factor 2, and Factor 3 were dependent variables. The intercorrelations between the predictor variables were low (ranging from .03 to .32). Table 2 shows Pearson correlations between the dependent variables and the predictor variables, while Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses.

The coefficients of determination ($R^2$) show that the variables in the equation explained more of the variance in scores on social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context (Factor 2) than on the two other factors. Age had a significant effect on both Factor 1 and Factor 2. Younger inmates were more likely than older inmates to start an education in prison for reasons linked to preparation for life upon release (Factor 1) or contextual reasons (Factor 2). Inmates with long sentences were more likely than those with shorter sentences to start an education in prison for reasons loading high on “to prepare for life upon release” (Factor 1) and also on Factor 3, “to acquire knowledge and skills.”

There was no significant effect of educational level on the preparation for life upon release category, but a significant effect of educational level appeared on the social and contextual category. Inmates with low education were more likely than those with high education to start an education for social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context. Level of education also had an effect on the knowledge and skills factor (Factor 3). Inmates with high education were more likely to start an education in prison based on this motive category. Citizenship also had a significant effect on the social and contextual motive category (Factor 2) and on the knowledge and skills category (Factor 3)—those with foreign citizenship were more likely than Norwegians to report such motives. Initially gender was also included as an independent variable, but the variable had no significant effect on any of the motive categories and did not contribute to the explained variance.
To examine interaction effects cross products of age by incarceration time, level of education, and citizenship were defined, and the cross product variables were added to the original analyses as block 2 (West, Aiken, & Krull, 1996) for all three motive factors. Only one analysis, when introducing Factor 3 as a dependent variable, showed a change in $R^2$ (from 0.035 to 0.063). However, the F-test of this change in $R^2$ was not significant, $F(10, 456) = 1.38$. Hence, the original analyses, showing main effects, were kept.

As both motives based on preparation for life upon release and knowledge and skills can be considered as pull motives, the items loading high on Factor 1 and Factor 3 were combined into a common pull factor. This is also consistent with the above mentioned relatively strong correlation between these factors. In order to examine how inmates’ age, incarceration time, education level, and citizenship related to this motive category, another regression analysis (non-stepwise) was conducted, with the common pull factor as a dependent variable. Both incarceration time and citizenship had a significant effect (< .01) on the factor. Inmates with long sentences were more likely than those with short sentences to start an education because of future concerns or interest in a subject, and non-Norwegian citizens were more likely than Norwegians to start an education for these reasons. There were no effects of age or level of education in this analysis.

Discussion

In the present study, three motive categories were identified: “To prepare for life upon release,” “social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context,” and “to acquire knowledge and skills.” Some of the items in the factor analysis had cross loadings. Although the number of cross loadings deviated somewhat from an ideal simple structure, many items had sufficiently strong loadings on unique factors (Gorsuch, 1983). The relatively strong inter-factor correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 3 (factor matrix $r = .31$; sum of items $r = .41$) is particularly interesting. A factor correlation of around .32 and above indicates more than 10% overlap of variance between factors, which is enough to justify oblique rotation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Furthermore, items belonging to Factor 3 also had crossloadings on Factor 1, even when the factors themselves were allowed to correlate. Finally, Factor 3 also accounted for the least amount of variance. Thus Factor 3 may be considered as less well-defined compared to the other factors.

It is reasonable to assume that inmates who are motivated to engage in education in order to prepare for life upon release (Factor 1) are also, to a certain extent, motivated by the possibility of acquiring knowledge and skills (Factor 3). These two motive categories are both emerging from clear educational intentions in contrast to motives that push inmates toward education. Furthermore, the mean level scores of Factor 1 and Factor 3 are relatively high, compared to the relatively low mean level score of Factor 2. Taken together, these findings are congruent with the theoretical distinction between push-factors (“social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context”) and pull-factors (to engage in education in order “to prepare for life upon release” and “to acquire knowledge and skills”).

The conceptualization of push and pull factors (Gambetta, 1987) is useful to illustrate that prison inmates can be influenced to start education by causes that may act relatively independently of their awareness (push factors, such as those emerging from a need to get away from prison routines), or act purposely and in accordance with more clear intentions (pull factors, such as task engagement itself or the need to get a job after release). The importance of preparation for life after release indicates that subjects tend to evaluate...
rationally various elements for making educational decisions. Gambetta (1987) found that 14–29-year-old students’ evaluations included economic constraints, personal academic ability, and expected labor market benefits. Likewise, many inmates’ educational decisions are formed through reflections about the future, plus a desire to be better able to cope with life after release and to make it easier to avoid committing crime.

Also the knowledge and skills category reflects that inmates’ motives can be the results of intentions and expected learning results. In comparison, inmates who are motivated by social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context tend to be less active and to be pushed by causes that are not primarily the product of their intentions. The pushing factors at work can be both social ones and those rooted in activities that the inmates want to avoid, such as prison work and prison routines. On the other hand, and in line with Gambetta (1987), we cannot conclude that subjects either base their educational choices on perfect rationality or that their behavior is determined by forces that they cannot control. The question is not so much at which extreme individuals tend to cluster, “but rather where on the slope they are likely to stop” (p. 29). The process of educational decisions, including those taken in prison, may take place on the basis of personal preferences and life plans, which are partly the result of educational history but also of specific social and contextual influences, as well as incarceration time, age, and cultural background.

Variables Influencing Educational Motives

Age had a significant relationship to educational motives. Younger inmates were more likely to have high scores on the factors “to prepare for life upon release” and “social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context.” Incarceration time also predicted preparation for life upon release significantly—those with longer incarcerations scored higher on this motive category. Thus, inmates who are young and inmates who have long sentences will be most motivated by future concerns, such as the opportunity to get a job or using education in prison as a bridge to more education after release. For them, education in prison may be considered as a second chance. Because long sentences here means more than five years they can still be rather young when they are released. When the two pull factors were combined into one factor, the significant relation between incarceration time and pull motives was confirmed. The study also showed that non-Norwegians were more likely to seek an education for social reasons and for reasons unique to the prison context and also for reasons based on a need for knowledge and skills. Other studies (Eikeland et al., 2006) show that foreign inmates in Norwegian prisons do not have lower education than Norwegian inmates. Further studies are needed to see whether the difference in educational motives between the groups are confirmed and why such differences appear.

There was no significant difference between inmates with low and high education in scores on the factor “to prepare for life upon release.” The result is in accord with Gee (2006), who concluded that goal orientation is a key component of motivation among inmates, but not in line with the assumption that the educationally disadvantaged inmates are primarily motivated by push factors, in contrast to the educationally advantaged inmates, who are motivated by pull factors (e.g., Costelloe, 2003; Forster, 1990). However, inmates with low education scored significantly higher on “social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context” than those with high education, but the former scored significantly lower on “to acquire knowledge and skills” than the latter. According to Costelloe (2003), this is hardly surprising as the more experienced students know the advantages
afforded by education, are able to see the benefits, and are pulled easily into continuing their interrupted study or upgrading their qualifications.

Motives Can Change During Incarceration

Inmates who are primarily moved by push factors may have low motivation for education due to feelings of incompetence, and because they do not value the educational activities. While in prison these inmates may not participate in education at all, or are moved toward education by causes unique to the prison context. On the contrary, inmates who are primarily attracted by pull factors are more clearly motivated by extrinsic values placed on learning (e.g., a reward) or intrinsic values (e.g., interest in a subject). From a learning perspective, the optimal motivation is intrinsic because it leads individuals to seek and master challenges (Bandura, 1993; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). However, external factors, such as rewards or engagement in an activity as a means to an end (e.g., a future job), may also affect intrinsic motivation positively when they are linked to actual level of performance or progress.

Inmates who start an education because they are being pushed by social or psychological forces may initially have low motivation, but subsequently change their motivation due to positive experiences. Forster (1990) observed that motivation could change as inmates were further along in their courses. While students’ initial motivations may have been anchored in a push factor, their continuing motivations seem to have evolved into a pull factor. The evolution is often due to the potential of a course in bringing to the surface motives that may have been submerged before, and not a simple case of just changing motives. Also Skaalvik et al. (2003) assume that an initial “negative” motivation, such as the avoidance of aspects of prison life, may produce a platform for the teachers to help inmates to bring other and more “positive” motives to the surface. Low self-efficacy, low self-esteem, or a sense of learned helplessness may prevent people from undertaking education, but nonetheless, under given circumstances, they might start education without clear intentions. It can be that they come to engage in the activities to obtain some expected future benefits or for the activity’s own sake. Costelloe (2003) discovered that some inmates’ initial motivation was embedded in push factors, but they developed an interest in pursuing further educational opportunities, thus their motivation evolved into pull factors.

In line with Covington and Mueller (2001) intrinsic and extrinsic tendencies can also be seen as two independent opportunities. At any given time inmates can be motivated by some of each. From this it follows that an inmate’s initial impetus to join an educational activity in prison or his continuing activity can at the same time include various extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The inmate can be pushed because he or she wants to take part in the social environment at the school and pulled to be better able to cope with life after release. For some individuals the former can dominate when they start an education, while the latter could dominate during later stages of the educational path.

Educationally disadvantaged inmates can also alter their motivation during ideal person–environment interactions. For inmates who in one way or another are pushed toward an education, a positive school experience or a favorable school performance in prison can convince them that they could be well suited to pursue further education. According to Costelloe (2003), the educationally disadvantaged could have continued with their delinquent lives and would probably not take up education if they did not have so much free time in prison: “Their perception of, and attitude to, participation in education changed as they acknowledged the personal benefits it had to offer them” (p. 149).
Implications and Limitations

A practical implication of the present results is that prison educators should develop appropriate and realistic responses to the various needs of the inmates. In particular, prison teachers need to be knowledgeable of the factors that can result in a transformation of the inmates’ motives, from those rooted in reasons unique to the prison context to motives that can produce a better platform for enhancing learning. A limitation of this study is that we did not have an opportunity to gather information about the kinds of crimes inmates had committed or variables such as hyperactivity and personality disorders, which can influence educational choices. It was also not possible to track inmates after their release to examine their social interactions and whether they managed to use their motivation to secure further education or employment. Future studies should compare inmates’ motivation in prison and upon their release. It would also be useful to study peer interactions and community contacts following release, as such interactions represent contextual factors that should increase or decrease the motivation for education.

References


