

# Influence of Offenders' Literacy Levels on Offenders' Rehabilitation through Vocational Training at Kisumu and Kisii Prisons Commands

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**Abstract:-** After the Dark Era of Colonial Kenya's retribution-oriented prisons system, prisons reform policy encompasses a rehabilitation concept entailing three main programs: vocational training, formal educational program (primarily primary and secondary education), and psychological and social (including religious components). Despite existence in principle, policy practice faces a myriad of challenges and policy analysis research is required to unpack dynamics of practice and generate evidence for improvement. This study, zooming in on vocational training program (VTP), examined the influence of offenders' literacy on the uptake of the said program. The study focused on Kisumu Prisons Command, the third-largest prison hosting male and female inmates, and Kisii Prisons Command, the Nyanza region's second-largest prison. Three specific objectives guided the investigation: Adopting the Constructivist Learning Theoretical Model and employing a mixed-methods approach, the study collected data from various sources, including male and female inmates, vocational training instructors, prison officers-in-charge, and external program collaborators. Qualitative insights were drawn through interviews with 9 officers-in-charge, 10 vocational training instructors, and 6 social welfare officers, equally distributed between Kisii and Kisumu. Quantitative data were collected via semi-structured questionnaires administered to male and female inmates, with sample sizes determined using Fischer et al.'s (1998) formula. Study showed that literacy levels remain low in both men and women prisons; more female offenders are enrolled into literacy, gendered and prison-context aspects of VTP uptake obtain and thus the need for more targeted policies focusing on literacy as a pre-cursor to enhancing VTP programs. The study emphasized the importance of designing programs that consider offenders' varying literacy levels to maximize their engagement and benefits. Conclusively, this research brought together theoretical frameworks and empirical investigation to provide actionable insights with implications for policy and practice. The findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of offender rehabilitation through VTPs, offering guidance for future initiatives that prioritize gender-sensitive approaches and holistic inmate rehabilitation.

**Keywords:-** *Offenders' literacy, rehabilitation, Kisumu prison, Kisii prison.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of colonialism in African nations, the enduring legacies of colonial rule continue to shape the formulation of public policies, particularly those aimed at societal transformation and the well-being of their citizens. Within the context of prisons, countries formerly colonized by the British inherited punitive prison practices deeply rooted in the British philosophy of retribution and incapacitation, which prioritized discipline and harsh treatment (Onyango-Israel, 2018). These practices not only subjected inmates to emotional torment in prisons that resembled graveyards during colonial times but also left lasting imprints on the Kenyan penal system (Ibid). Barik (2018, p.128) aptly describes the incapacitation approach as one that placed a heavy emphasis on arduous and unproductive labor while intentionally making the prison environment as inhospitable as possible. Some scholarly works argue that these punitive disciplinary approaches, while detrimental to all inmates, disproportionately affected women offenders and inmates (Barik, 2018; Penal Reform International [PRI], 2008).

Despite the recognition of the gendered impact of punitive prison practices, research on prison reform initiatives such as the Vocational Training Program (VTP) has largely overlooked the gender dimension, failing to explore how such programs might differently affect the rehabilitation of male and female offenders. This study seeks to address this critical gap in the literature by investigating the gendered implications of prison reform efforts, specifically focusing on the VTP.

The study primarily delved into the examination of how literacy levels impact the participation of both male and female offenders in the Vocational Training Program (VTP) and, consequently, the program's capacity to rehabilitate them equitably. Existing literature universally acknowledges that the VTP must take into consideration the literacy levels of prison inmates in its design and implementation (Graaf, 2007). Gender-focused analyses of previous studies, both within Kenya (Mbathi et al., 2019) and beyond its borders (Burrow, 2011; IPR, 2008), consistently reveal that female offenders tend to have markedly higher rates of illiteracy compared to their male counterparts. This observation logically suggests that the uptake of the VTP among female offenders might be lower in comparison to male offenders. In the United States, Burrow (2011) discovered that a significant number of inmates, regardless of their African or Asian origins, had low literacy levels. Onyango-Israel emphasizes in his review of Institutional Treatment of Female Offenders in Kenya that the population of female offenders is on the rise,

with a majority of them hailing from impoverished backgrounds, often dealing with issues like HIV/AIDS, exhibiting low literacy levels, and grappling with substance abuse. He further asserts that rehabilitation programs in prisons should prioritize female inmates and be tailored to address their unique characteristics. This assertion is further substantiated by a recent survey conducted by the Government of Kenya (GoK) in 2021, known as the Household Economic Survey, which shows a 9.8% increase in the number of women offenders. Maina & Mugambi (2019) have found that low literacy levels significantly impede offenders' ability to fully engage in vocational training, as they often need to cover basic literacy skills before comprehending the course content. However, Maina & Mugambi's study does not delve into whether the vocational courses offered consider the specific needs of female offenders or to what extent female offenders' literacy levels affect their participation in vocational training. This present study aims to explore how this critical aspect of offenders' perspectives contributes to varying levels of participation in the VTP.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature problematizes the relationship between literacy levels, vocational training, and offender rehabilitation but empirical work that have investigated this problem remain dearth. Notably, Garcia (2007) highlights that the lack of basic literacy among a number of offenders is likely a hindrance to effective rehabilitation of offenders owing to the fact that the educational backgrounds of inmates is largely poor (post-secondary and below). However, the study doesn't engage in case-oriented analysis of how the two variables interact with each other.

Furthermore, a notable research gap emerges regarding the gender responsiveness of vocational training program processes, specifically in addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by women inmates, or the need for gender-differentiated programs (Onyango, 2013). This study while highlighting how literacy affect uptake of vocational training program (VTP) examines this relationship across the prisons (Kisumu and Kisii) and across gender.

A dimension of the relationship between offenders' literacy and ability of the VTP to have an impact on them is understanding whether they are enrolled into these programs. Onyango (2013), Mbatha (2019), Ndegwa (2014) all argue that Kenyan prisons still exhibit low enrolment into vocational training programs. Mutemi (2017) argues that there is the low enrollment into VTP is a matter of many factors, including funding, but also the lack of offenders' capacity to enroll into technical courses. This study stretches this analysis to understand the role of literacy into enrollment of offenders into VTP. The study makes this analysis first through the viewpoint of the variances from prison to prison (the two selected prisons). Gender and prison context perspectives are critical in highlighting how solutions to VPT can be tailored, need be, for optimal uptake.

To appraise the relationship of offenders' literacy and uptake of VTP as a rehabilitative mechanism is it important to acknowledge the impact of formal education on uptake of VTP. Extant studies while acknowledging the need for this trajectory of research have not yet examined this relationship. Mbatha (2019) for example establishes that on ground where VTP remains incapable to delivering rehabilitation of offenders is the lack of evidence of whether offenders need VTP or formal education or both simultaneously. Mucemi (2010) finds that for those ex-offenders who were trained at prisons – that is formal education – their educational outcomes was better than those who only acquired VTP, implying a need for formal education not just to increase uptake of VTP while in prisons, but also to increase chances for better performance in post-prison furthering of formal education by ex-offenders.

This study also examined the influence of formal education on course choice by inmates. With low levels of literacy as many studies have shown across countries and prisons (Obondi, 2010; Mutemi, 2017; Wambugu, 2019; Ondigo, Rono & Kerre, n.d; Ngachra & Kimokoti, 2023; Ndegwa, 2014; Mburu, 2021; Musau, 2014; Nancy, 2012; Koome, Wafula & Nyonje, 2019; Mbugua, 2011), it is important to understand empirically how offenders' level of education/literacy basically influences that offenders' choice of course, in terms of the type of course offender feels capable to undertake successfully. The analysis is done by prison and by gender to reveal the intricacies therein for more practical policy recommendations.

Lastly, the final dimension of the relationship between offenders' literacy and uptake of VTP examined in this study is offenders' needs and the prioritization between formal education and VTP. The study examined what offenders think should be done to them first, formal education or direct involvement into VTP? Previous studies do not engage in this analysis, albeit some acceptance that both formal education and VTP are important rehabilitation programs in prisons (Mukinisi, 2015; Maritim, Otieno & Kisimbii, 2018; Lumumba, 2016; Okang'a, 2014; Nyariki, Bor & Onsarigo, 2019; Mandela, 2015).

Therefore, this study engages in an empirical analysis of the relationship of offenders' level of their rehabilitation through VTP. Specifically, the study examines the influence offenders' literacy levels have on the capacity of the VTP to empower the offenders through proper skills acquisition.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed certain methods keenly chosen to collect data, analyze and interpret the data. These methods are categorized into research design, study area, research population, sampling procedures and size, reliability and validity, data collection, and finally data analysis methods.

The study employed a descriptive survey design to gather authentic information in alignment with its focus on the influence of offenders' literacy on their rehabilitation through VTP. A mixed-method approach was chosen, involving the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. This concurrent approach was deemed appropriate due to a prior mapping study that had already assessed the feasibility of the research focus, eliminating the need for a sequential data collection process. The qualitative data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions. The integration of both types of data was planned to facilitate triangulation. Furthermore, the research took place in Kisumu and Kisii command prisons, selected based on their size, experience, and involvement in vocational training programs. The two prisons are leading in Western Kenya in terms of number of offenders they host. Moreover, VTP programs have been practiced in these prisons longest relative to other prisons in Western Kenya and they also both male and female offenders, hence enabling a gendered-analysis of the findings. These prisons were expected to provide a representative sample and enable generalization of findings. The research population included key informants and survey participants, with a sample size of 369 offenders, calculated using Fisher's et al. (1998) formula. To ensure reliability and validity, triangulation, mapping exercises, pre-test studies, and data split techniques were employed. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, encompassing various stages to comprehensively explore vocational training programs in Kenyan prisons.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study analyzed the intricate interplay between offenders' literacy levels and their engagement with vocational training programs within the prison context of Kisumu and Kisii Command Prisons. Guided by the Constructivist Learning Theory, this chapter sheds light on the complex relationship between gender, prison environments, literacy levels, and the adoption of vocational training as a rehabilitation strategy. The following sections present the empirical findings obtained through cross-tabulated analyses, providing a comprehensive understanding of the nuances underlying inmates' interactions with vocational training programs and literacy enhancement initiatives.

##### A. Reading and Writing by Designation, Name of Prison and by Gender

Reading and writing are foundational elements of literacy particularly within prisons environments (Okang'a, 2014; Nyariki, Bor & Onsarigo, 2019; Mandela, 2015; Koome, Wafula & Nyonje, 2019). Actually Koome, Wafula & Nyonje (2019), argues that educational programs in prisons is a key variable for inmates' rehabilitation. In this sense, the study

examined the status of inmates' basic literacy across designations, prisons, and gender.

##### ➤ Status of Reading and Writing by Designation

This table 1 below explores the relationship between respondents' designations in the prison environment, their gender, their prison of stay, and their literacy levels. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages.

In this table, the data is categorized by respondents' designations in the prison environment. It's apparent that the majority of inmates (15.2%) reported not knowing how to read and write, suggesting a painstakingly high level of illiteracy among this group. This is a calling upon policy implementers of the formal educational programs to make such programs robust and comprehensive to cover most offenders, particularly those whose literacy is low or none at the point of admission into prisons.

During the interviews with Trainers and Officer in Charges (OICs), the study established that there are three important literacy/formal educational programs that are available to the inmates in the prisons, namely primary education, secondary education, and tertiary – theological-based training which only available within Kisumu Prisons Command. Most inmates reported during the focus group discussions (FGDs) that they had not gone to any school at all or dropped at lower classes because no one could support them to go on with education. This sits well with findings from other studies. For example, Mbugua (2011) argues that most offenders come from poor backgrounds and had no opportunities for legal jobs leading them to criminal activities. This further reinforces the need for making the formal education program more robust to cover as many people as possible. For example, UNDP (2015) argues that inclusion of vulnerable populations perspectives is impossible without empowering them. Thus, for a genuine constructivist model of rehabilitation, it is important to target inmates with literacy enhancing programs.

Among other designations, such as Trainer Police Officers and VTP Officers in Charge, all respondents in these categories reported knowing how to read and write. This could be attributed to the nature of their roles, which might involve communication and administrative tasks that require literacy skills. Moreover, it is a requirement during recruitment that all potential recruits into national police service have a form four education (Government of Kenya, 2022).

Table 1: Reading and Writing by Designation

**3. Which of the following designations fits you in this prison environment? \* 18. Do you know how to read and write? Cross-tabulation**

Count		18. Do you know how to read and write?		Total
		Yes	No	
	3. Which of the following designations fits you in this prison environment?	50 (15.2%)	278 (84.8%)	328 (100%)
	Inmate	26(100%)	0(0%)	26(100)
	Trainer	15(100%)	0(0%)	15(100%)
	Police Officer	91 (24.5%)	278(75.5%)	369 (100%)
	VTP Officer in Charge			
	Total			

Source: Omondi (2023).

The data in this table does not explicitly focus on gender, but it provides insight into the literacy levels across different roles within the prison environment. The high percentage of inmates who reported knowing how to read and write is a positive indicator of access to education within the prison system. However, without gender-specific data, we can't draw conclusions about how literacy might differ between male and female inmates. For a more nuanced understanding of gendered perspectives on literacy, it's crucial to analyze gender-specific data in subsequent tables

➤ *Status of Reading and Writing by Gender*

This table 2 examines the relationship between respondents' gender and their literacy levels, presented in frequencies and percentages. Among male respondents, 19% reported knowing how to read and write, while among female respondents, 10% reported the same. Among the "None-inmates" category, OICs and Trainers, all respondents reported knowing how to read and write.

Table 2: Reading and Writing by Gender

**2. Respondent's Gender? \* 18. Do you know how to read and write? Cross-tabulation**

Count		18. Do you know how to read and write?		
		Yes	No	Total
	3. Which of the following designations fits you in this prison environment?	35(19%)	147(81%)	182(100%)
	Male	15(10%)	131(90%)	146(100%)
	Female	41(100%)	0	41(100%)
	None-inmates	91(15.2%)	278(84.8%)	369(100%)
	Total			

Source: Omondi (2023).

The data demonstrates a significant difference in literacy levels between male and female respondents. Males tend to have a higher percentage of literacy compared to females. From the focus group discussions, this difference was attributed to various factors, including access to education before incarceration and potential gender-specific barriers to education. To address gendered perspectives on literacy, it's important to consider the unique challenges that female inmates might face in accessing education and improving their literacy skills. The value of this finding is that it adds a gendered lens to understanding the status of basic literacy at prisons, going beyond non-gendered analyses that is common in previous studies, targeting mainly male prisons, and effectively silencing the voices of the female offenders (Mbugua, 2011; Koome, Wafula & Nyonje, 2019; Okang'a, 2014; Mandela, 2015). In the spirit of the theory of Constructivist Learning, this study provides an opportunity to tailor-make initiatives toward education of inmates to the needs of a given gender, focusing more on females who remain largely illiterate, not even knowing how to read and write.

➤ *Status of Reading and Writing by Name of Prison*

This table 3 below explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and their literacy levels, presented in percentages it explores the literacy levels of respondents based on the prison they are staying in. The data as summarized below shows that across prisons the levels of literacy is a serious problem. In Kisii Women, only 7.8% were able to read and write, only 17% from Kisumu Women were able to read and write. Kisumu Maximum reported higher levels at 22% and this was due to the availability of both secondary and primary with the premises of the Maximum as revealed through observation, and key informant interviews. Moreover, many trainees of VTP from Kisumu Medium reported that they were assigned to the firms and had not time to attend to school, and also there were cases where some inmates who had very good secondary performance papers, could not be transferred to Maximum where secondary school is located. Kisii Main Campus witnessed the highest number of those who could read and write in terms of intra-cohort sample (85.6%). Officers from Kisii Main argued that thus was due to the currently overwhelming numbers they receive and without commensurate number of educators, classrooms, and other teaching facilities. This in line with what Okang'a (2014)



finds out, when he argues that reformation of offenders at Kisumu Prions was complicated due to lack of officers to teach and the increasingly additional numbers.

The "Non-inmates" category (referring to staff or non-inmates working within the prison, that is, officers in-incharges and professional officers/ VTP Trainers) all reported knowing how to read and write.

Table 3: Reading and Writing by Prison

2. What is the name of your prison of stay? * 18. Do you know how to read and write? Cross-tabulation				
Count				
		18. Do you know how to read and write?		Total
		Yes	No	
2. What is the name of your prison of stay?	Kisii Women	6 (7.8%)	71(92.2%)	77 (100%)
	Kisumu Women	9 (17.0%)	45 (83.0%)	54 (100%)
	Kisumu Maximum	15(22.0%)	53 (78.0%)	68 (100%)
	Kisumu Medium	9 (17.0%)	44(83.0%)	53 (100%)
	Kisii Main	11(14.4%)	65(85.6%)	76(100%)
	Non-inmates	41(100%)	0(0%)	41(100%)
Total		91(24.7%)	278(75.3%)	369(100%)

Source: Omondi (2023).

The data suggests variations in literacy levels across different prisons. While the data doesn't explicitly focus on gender, it underscores the importance of considering prison-specific factors when implementing literacy enhancement programs. Gendered perspectives should also be considered to ensure equitable access to education and rehabilitation programs, especially in prisons where literacy rates are lower. Such considerations can help address gender-based disparities in literacy within the prison context. In summary, analyzing the cross-tabulated data in terms of percentages and interpreting the implications for gendered perspectives on literacy reveals insights into the literacy levels of respondents based on their gender, prison of stay, and designations within

the prison environment. This understanding can inform targeted interventions to address gender-specific challenges in accessing education and enhancing literacy skills for effective rehabilitation.

*B. Enrolment into a Formal Education by Name of Prison and by Gender*

➤ *Enrolment into a Formal Education by Gender*

The table 3 below examines the relationship between respondents' gender and whether they have been enrolled in formal education programs within the prison. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages.

Table 4: Enrolment into a Formal Education by Name of Prison and by Gender

**1. Gender of Respondent \* 19. Have you been enrolled into the formal education going on in this prison?**

**Cross-tabulation**

Count

		19. Have you ever been enrolled into the formal education going on in this prison?			Total
		Yes	No	N/A	
1. Gender of Respondent	Male	67(28%)	144(61%)	27(11%)	238(100%)
	Female	59(45%)	58(44%)	14(11%)	131(100%)
Total		126(34%)	202(55%)	41(11%)	369(100%)

Source: Omondi (2023).

This section explored the enrollment of respondents in formal education programs within the prison environment based on their gender. Among male respondents, 28% reported being enrolled in formal education, while among female respondents, 45% reported the same. The table also shows that there are some respondents in both categories who haven't been enrolled (evident in the "No" count) or for whom the question is not applicable (evident in the "N/A" count). The data indicates that a higher percentage of female respondents have been enrolled in formal education programs compared to male respondents. This suggests a positive step toward solving the problem of high illiteracy especially in female population as the table 3 showed.

Interview with Kisumu Women Officer-in-Charges showed that the institution has taken formal education seriously are encouraging the inmates to prioritize the classes. The sentiments were shared by Kisii OICs, who, however, showed that there were gaps in terms of teaching equipment, lack of resources for innovative teaching, and lack of enough staff, to teach a good number of offenders.

➤ *Enrolment into a Formal Education by Name of Prison*

This table 5 explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and their enrollment in formal education programs, presented in percentages.

Table 5: Enrolment into a Formal Education by Name of Prison

**2. What is the name of your prison of stay? \* 19. Have you been enrolled into the formal education going on in this prison? Cross-tabulation**

		19. Have you been enrolled into the formal education going on in this prison?			Total
		Yes	No	N/A	
2. What is the name of your prison of stay?	Kisii Women	27(32%)	50(60%)	7(8%)	84(100%)
	Kisumu Women	35(56%)	18(29%)	9(15%)	62(100%)
	Kisumu Maximum	15(19%)	54(69%)	9(12%)	78(100%)
	Kisumu Medium	17(28%)	36(62%)	8(13%)	61(100%)
	Kisii Main	22(26%)	54(64%)	8(10%)	84(100%)
Total		126(34%)	202(55%)	41(11%)	369(100%)

Source: Omondi (2023).

The sub-section examines the enrollment of respondents in formal education programs within the prison environment based on the name of the prison they are staying in. Different prisons have different percentages of respondents who have been enrolled in formal education. The data reveals variations in enrollment percentages across different prisons. In Kisii Women 32% are enrolled, in Kisumu Women it is 56%, in Kisumu Maximum it is 19%, in Kisumu Medium it is 28%, while Kisii main it was 26%. "Kisumu Women" prison has the highest percentage (56%) of respondents who have been enrolled in formal education, while "Kisii Women" prison has a lower percentage (32%). These differences were reported to be influenced by factors such as available educational programs, resources, and prison-specific policies, in Kisii Women the salient explanation was the post-primary education was not seriously taken, with the available slots largely for primary option, further limiting women empowerment through education.

Enrollment in formal education programs within the prison environment is a vital indicator of inmates' access to educational opportunities. The data suggests variations in enrollment rates based on both gender and the name of the prison. Higher enrollment rates among females and in certain prisons indicate that efforts are being made to address gendered perspectives on access to education. These findings

underscore the importance of continued investment in educational programs within the prison system, particularly with attention to gender-specific needs and equitable access across different prisons. Mutemi (2017) asserts that there is high need for such investments to include regular disbursement of funds to enable acquiring of resources needed for education and the employment of teacher officers with educational background in primary and secondary education. In sum, analyzing the cross-tabulated data for enrollment in formal education programs based on gender and prison names provides insights into the disparities in educational access. These insights can inform policies and interventions to ensure gender equity and equal opportunities for education within the prison context.

➤ *Enhancement of Literacy Levels by Gender*

This table examines the relationship between respondents' gender and whether their literacy levels have been enhanced after enrolling in formal education programs within the prison. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages. Among male respondents, 28% reported that their literacy levels have been enhanced, while among female respondents, 45% reported the same. The table also shows that there are some respondents for whom the question is not applicable (evident in the "N/A" count), likely due to not being enrolled in formal education.

Table 6: Enhancement of Literacy Levels by Gender

**1. Gender of Respondent \* 20. If yes in 17 above, has your literacy levels been enhanced (can you now read and write)? Cross-tabulation**

		20. If yes in 17 above, has your literacy levels been enhanced?		Total
		Yes	N/A	
1. Gender of Respondent	Male	67 (28%)	171(72%)	238(100%)
	Female	59 (45%)	72 (55%)	131 (100%)
Total		126 (34%)	243 (66%)	369 (100%)

Source: Omondi (2023).

The data indicated that formal education generally has an impact on both genders and should be encouraged as a factor in enhancing the rehabilitation capacity of the VTP program. Scrutinized further, however, the data indicates that a higher percentage of female respondents reported their literacy levels being enhanced after enrolling in formal

education programs compared to female respondents. This suggests that there are some concerted efforts put into place to make the formal education programs more effective in enhancing literacy skills for female inmates. Policy implications for this finding which were shared from the interviews involved tailoring education programs to address

the specific needs of both inmates, while making the prisons environments better for female inmates. Suggestions also included the need for evaluation of the curriculum to ensure effective literacy enhancement. Most OICs and of cause inmates reported that they could not remember a time when the government had conducted an evaluation of VTP programs. Thus, Officers from both Kisumu and Kisii reported that this was a key hinderance to improving the formal education program. For example, Kisii prison continues to lack any form of post-secondary education, and additionally, the prison did not have a secondary level-formal education. This is critical thus this study unravels areas for policy improvement. This limits genuine empowerment of female.

*C. Enhancement of Literacy Levels by Prison*

The table 7 below explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and whether their literacy levels have been enhanced after enrolling in formal education programs, presented in percentages. This table examines whether respondents' literacy levels have been enhanced after enrolling in formal education programs, based on the name of the prison they are staying in. Different prisons have different percentages of respondents who reported their literacy levels being enhanced.

Table 7: Enhancement of Literacy Levels by Prison

**2. What is the name of your prison of stay? \* 20. If yes in 17 above, has your literacy levels been enhanced?**

**Cross-tabulation**

Count

		20. If yes in 17 above, has your literacy levels been enhanced?		Total
		Yes	N/A	
2. What is the name of your prison of stay?	Kisii Women	27 (32%)	57 (68%)	84 (100%)
	Kisumu Women	35 (56%)	27 (44%)	62 (100%)
	Kisumu Maximum	15 (19%)	63 (81%)	78 (100%)
	Kisumu Medium	17 (28%)	44 (72%)	61 (100%)
	Kisii Main	22 (26%)	62 (74%)	84 (100%)
Total		126 (34%)	243 (66%)	369 (100%)

Source: Omondi (2023).

The data reveals variations in the percentages of respondents who reported their literacy levels being enhanced across different prisons. Some prisons, like "Kisumu Women," have higher percentages of reported literacy enhancement, while others, like "Kisumu Maximum," have lower percentages. Policy implications from this analysis could involve analyzing the effectiveness of education programs in enhancing literacy levels in different prisons and making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes.

**Overall,** the data on the enhancement of literacy levels after enrolling in formal education programs provides insights into the impact of education on inmates' literacy skills. The higher percentage of females reporting enhanced literacy levels suggests potential success in tailored educational interventions. It also highlights the importance of evaluating and refining educational programs to meet the unique needs of male and female inmates. These findings underscore the role of education in improving inmates' readiness for vocational training programs and their successful rehabilitation. In summary, analyzing the cross-tabulated data for enhancement of literacy levels based on gender and prison names offers insights into the effectiveness of formal education programs in improving inmates' literacy skills. These insights can inform policy decisions and program adjustments to enhance the impact of education on inmates' vocational training readiness, contributing to their successful reintegration into society.

➤ *Rating of Literacy as a Hindrance to Vocational Training by Gender*

The deepen understanding of the influence of literacy on VTP uptake, the study examined the relationship between respondents' gender and the extent to which their level of literacy is a hindrance to their enrollment into and/or maximum gain from the vocational training program. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages through simplified cross-tab technique.

Table 8: Rating of Literacy as a Hindrance to Vocational Training by Gender

Respondent Gender	Rating of Literacy Hindrance	Total
Male	1: 4 (1.68%)	238
	2: 13 (5.46%)	
	3: 46 (19.33%)	
	4: 91 (38.16%)	
	5: 58 (24.37%)	
	N/A: 26 (10.92%)	
Female	1: 0 (0.00%)	131
	2: 6 (4.58%)	
	3: 14 (10.69%)	
	4: 16 (12.21%)	
	5: 80 (61.07%)	
	N/A: 15 (11.45%)	
Total	Total 1: 4 (1.08%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

The table 8 above captures respondents' ratings of how much their literacy levels hinder their participation in vocational training programs, based on their gender. Among male respondents, 24.37% rated their hindrance as "5" (most likely), while among female respondents, 61.07% rated the same way. Additionally, some respondents did not provide a rating (evident in the "N/A" count). The data suggests that a higher percentage of female respondents feel their literacy levels significantly hinder their participation in vocational training programs, further corroborating earlier finding that female offenders enter prisons with low literacy levels. This finding also indicates a potential need for targeted literacy enhancement programs for female inmates but also men, to ensure equal access and successful participation in vocational training.

Interviews with trainers and OICs confirmed that literacy is a key factor in enhancing the uptake of VTP. One trainer shared a view held by most other trainers, arguing that:

VTP is not just practical. It also encompasses a theory bit. Inmate who cannot read and write cannot be properly rehabilitate with the program because they lack the basics to even write down quotations. This makes them vulnerable to

the market, and only serve as hands-men not real fundis Kiswahili for a technician).

The excerpt shows that literacy really matters for [proper uptake of VT. Thus while the study finds that the two programs as viewed in practice as mutually exclusive, there is need for a cost-benefit analysis to reveal the real benefits and costs for viewing them as the same sides of a single coin, with each program involving the other in terms of their implementation. For example. For maximum uptake, most trainers showed that the VTP would come after acquiring formal literacy or advanced training, enabling graduates from the formal education program have the ability to participate in the program.

➤ *Rating of Literacy as a Hindrance to Vocational Training by Prison*

This table explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and the extent to which their level of literacy is a hindrance to their enrollment into and/or maximum gain from the vocational training program, presented in percentages.

Table 9: Rating of Literacy as a Hindrance to Vocational Training by Prison

Name of Prison	Rating of Literacy Hindrance	Total
Kisii Women	1: 0 (0.00%)	84
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 8 (9.52%)	
	4: 12 (14.29%)	
	5: 56 (66.67%)	
	N/A: 8 (9.52%)	
Kisumu Women	1: 0 (0.00%)	62
	2: 16 (25.81%)	
	3: 6 (9.68%)	
	4: 9 (14.52%)	
	5: 23 (37.10%)	



Name of Prison	Rating of Literacy Hindrance	Total
	N/A: 8 (12.90%)	
Kisumu Maximum	1: 0 (0.00%)	78
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 0 (0.00%)	
	4: 30 (38.46%)	
	5: 38 (48.72%)	
	N/A: 10 (12.82%)	
Kisumu Medium	1: 0 (0.00%)	61
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 9 (14.75%)	
	4: 38 (62.30%)	
	5: 6 (9.84%)	
	N/A: 8 (13.11%)	
Kisii Main	1: 4 (5.00%)	76
	2: 3 (3.75%)	
	3: 37 (46.25%)	
	4: 18 (22.50%)	
	5: 14 (17.50%)	
	N/A: 9 (11.25%)	
Total	Total 1: 4 (1.08%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

The table above analyzed respondents' ratings of how much their literacy levels hinder their participation in vocational training programs, based on the prison they are staying in. The data shows variations in the ratings across different prisons. The data suggests that inmates from different prisons have varying perceptions of how much their literacy levels hinder their participation in vocational training programs. Policies should consider prison-specific interventions to address literacy-related hindrances, particularly in prisons with higher percentages of inmates reporting hindrance (e.g., "Kisumu Maximum"). Equitable

access to literacy-enhancing resources should be ensured for inmates in all prisons.

➤ *Rating of influence of Literacy on Type of Training by Gender*

This table examines the relationship between respondents' gender and the extent to which their literacy levels have defined the type of vocational training program to enroll into. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages.

Table 10: Rating of influence of Literacy on Type of Training by Gender

Respondent Gender	Rating of Type of Training	Total
Male	1: 4 (1.68%)	238
	2: 13 (5.46%)	
	3: 46 (19.33%)	
	4: 91 (38.16%)	
	5: 58 (24.37%)	
	N/A: 26 (10.92%)	
Female	1: 0 (0.00%)	131
	2: 6 (4.58%)	
	3: 14 (10.69%)	
	4: 16 (12.21%)	
	5: 79 (60.31%)	
	N/A: 15 (11.45%)	
Total	Total 1: 4 (1.08%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

This table 10 above captures respondents' ratings of how much their literacy levels have defined the type of vocational training program they enroll into, based on their gender. Among female respondents, 60.31% rated their literacy as significantly defining the type of training, compared to 24.37% of male respondents. Similar to previous tables, some respondents did not provide a rating (evident in the "N/A" count). The data suggests that a higher percentage of female respondents believe their literacy levels significantly define the type of vocational training they can enroll in. Policies should focus on offering a diverse range of vocational training programs that accommodate varying literacy levels, particularly for female inmates, to ensure

inclusive participation and successful rehabilitation. Secondly, female literacy levels should be enhanced to ensure that they are able to enroll in not merely female-dominated fields such as hands-made-based trades: embroidery, food related courses etc.

➤ *Rating of influence of Literacy on Type of Training by Prison*

This table 11 explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and the extent to which their literacy levels have defined the type of vocational training program to enroll into, presented in percentages.

Table 11: Rating of influence of Literacy on Type of Training by Prison

Name of Prison	Rating of Type of Training	Total
Kisii Women	1: 0 (0.00%)	84
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 8 (9.52%)	
	4: 12 (14.29%)	
	5: 56 (66.67%)	
	N/A: 8 (9.52%)	
Kisumu Women	1: 0 (0.00%)	62
	2: 16 (25.81%)	
	3: 6 (9.68%)	
	4: 9 (14.52%)	
	5: 23 (37.10%)	
	N/A: 8 (12.90%)	
Kisumu Maximum	1: 0 (0.00%)	78
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 0 (0.00%)	
	4: 30 (38.46%)	
	5: 38 (48.72%)	
	N/A: 10 (12.82%)	
Kisumu Medium	1: 0 (0.00%)	61
	2: 0 (0.00%)	
	3: 9 (14.75%)	
	4: 38 (62.30%)	
	5: 6 (9.84%)	
	N/A: 8 (13.11%)	
Kisii Main	1: 4 (5.00%)	76
	2: 3 (3.75%)	
	3: 37 (46.25%)	
	4: 18 (22.50%)	
	5: 13 (16.25%)	
	N/A: 9 (11.25%)	
Total	Total 1: 4 (1.08%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

This table 12 analyzes respondents' ratings of how much their literacy levels have defined the type of vocational training program they enroll into, based on the prison they are staying in. The data shows variations in the ratings across

different prisons. The data implies that the perception of how much literacy levels define the type of vocational training varies among inmates from different prisons. Policies should consider prison-specific strategies to address the influence of

literacy on vocational training course choices. Ensuring a variety of training options and providing support for skill development could empower inmates to make informed choices.

➤ *Formal Literacy Education Priority by Gender*

This table examines the relationship between respondents' gender and the extent to which they agree that their priority need is pursuing formal education as a precursor for vocational training programs. The data is presented in terms of counts and percentages.

Table 12: Rating of Formal Literacy Education Priority by Gender

Respondent Gender	Agreement with Formal Education as Priority	Total
Male	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	238
	Disagree: 10 (4.20%)	
	Moderately Agree: 46 (19.33%)	
	Agree: 98 (41.18%)	
	Highly Agree: 58 (24.37%)	
	N/A: 26 (10.92%)	
Female	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	131
	Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	
	Moderately Agree: 0 (0.00%)	
	Agree: 36 (27.48%)	
	Highly Agree: 115 (87.79%)	
	N/A: 16 (12.21%)	
Total	Total Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

The table above reveals the respondents' agreement level with prioritizing formal education as a precursor for vocational training programs, based on their gender. A significant percentage of female respondents (87.79%) highly agree with the priority of formal education, compared to 24.37% of male respondents. The data indicates that female inmates highly prioritize formal education as a precursor for vocational training and agrees with previous findings already presented that while literacy matter for all inmates to boost their rehabilitation through VTP, it does to females than males. Policies should focus on providing accessible and

quality formal education programs within the prison system, particularly for female inmates. This aligns with the inmates' preferences and can enhance their participation and success in vocational training programs.

➤ *Formal Literacy Education Priority by Prison*

This table explores the relationship between the respondents' prison of stay and their agreement level with prioritizing formal education as a precursor for vocational training programs, presented in percentages.

Table 13: Rating of Formal Literacy Education Priority by Prison

Name of Prison	Agreement with Formal Education Priority	Total
Kisii Women	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	84
	Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	
	Moderately Agree: 8 (9.52%)	
	Agree: 12 (14.29%)	
	Highly Agree: 56 (66.67%)	
	N/A: 8 (9.52%)	
Kisumu Women	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	62
	Disagree: 16 (25.81%)	
	Moderately Agree: 6 (9.68%)	
	Agree: 9 (14.52%)	
	Highly Agree: 23 (37.10%)	
	N/A: 8 (12.90%)	
Kisumu Maximum	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	78
	Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	
	Moderately Agree: 0 (0.00%)	

Name of Prison	Agreement with Formal Education Priority	Total
	Agree: 30 (38.46%)	
	Highly Agree: 38 (48.72%)	
	N/A: 10 (12.82%)	
Kisumu Medium	Highly Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	61
	Disagree: 0 (0.00%)	
	Moderately Agree: 9 (14.75%)	
	Agree: 38 (62.30%)	
	Highly Agree: 6 (9.84%)	
	N/A: 8 (13.11%)	
Kisii Main	Highly Disagree: 4 (5.00%)	76
	Disagree: 3 (3.75%)	
	Moderately Agree: 37 (46.25%)	
	Agree: 18 (22.50%)	
	Highly Agree: 13 (16.25%)	
	N/A: 9 (11.25%)	
Total	Total Highly Disagree: 4 (1.08%)	369

Source: Omondi (2023).

Table 13 above analyzes respondents' agreement level with prioritizing formal education as a precursor for vocational training programs, based on the prison they are staying in. The data indicates variations in agreement levels across different prisons. The data implies that inmates from different prisons have varying degrees of agreement regarding the priority of formal education for vocational training. To ensure equitable access to educational opportunities and tailored rehabilitation, policies should consider the unique perspectives of inmates from various prisons and provide suitable programs accordingly.

In conclusion, these findings shed light on the complex interactions between gender, prison context, and literacy levels in relation to vocational training programs. The interpretation and policy implications provide guidance for developing inclusive and effective rehabilitation strategies that prioritize literacy enhancement and vocational training, while acknowledging the diverse needs and preferences of inmates across different prisons and genders.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this comprehensive study sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics of offenders' literacy levels, gender disparities, and their engagement with vocational training programs in the correctional facilities of Kisumu and Kisii Command Prisons. It is evident from the findings that illiteracy is a pervasive issue among inmates, underscoring the urgent need for more robust and inclusive formal education programs within prison walls. Furthermore, the gender disparities in literacy levels demand immediate attention, with female inmates facing greater challenges in accessing education and vocational training.

One of the key takeaways from this study is the pivotal role that formal education plays in inmates' rehabilitation and their readiness for vocational training programs. It is clear that enhancing literacy skills not only empowers inmates with

the fundamental tools necessary for their rehabilitation but also significantly influences their participation and success in vocational training. The study reinforces the interconnectedness of education and vocational training as complementary components of the rehabilitation process, emphasizing the need for a coordinated and holistic approach to prisoner reintegration. The study's findings carry significant policy implications, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive education programs, equitable resource distribution across prisons, and the continuous evaluation and refinement of rehabilitation strategies. Ultimately, the study underscores that improving inmates' literacy levels and expanding access to education and vocational training are essential steps toward breaking the cycle of incarceration and facilitating their successful reintegration into society.

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## STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. For Future Studies

- Conduct in-depth qualitative research to explore the specific barriers and challenges faced by female inmates in accessing education and vocational training within the prison system.
- Investigate the long-term impact of enhanced literacy levels on inmates' post-release employment opportunities and recidivism rates.



- Examine the effectiveness of vocational training programs in various prison settings and their alignment with inmates' literacy levels and post-release aspirations.

#### B. For Donors

- Support initiatives aimed at expanding and improving formal education programs within prisons, with a focus on both male and female inmates.
- Fund research and pilot projects that explore innovative approaches to bridging the gender gap in literacy and vocational training within correctional facilities.
- Invest in the development of resources, such as educational materials and teaching staff, to ensure the success of literacy enhancement programs.

#### C. For Government Policymakers

- Develop gender-responsive policies and programs within the prison system to address the unique needs of female inmates, including tailored literacy enhancement and vocational training opportunities.
- Regularly evaluate the curriculum and effectiveness of vocational training programs to ensure they align with inmates' literacy levels and equip them with relevant skills for reintegration.
- Prioritize the allocation of resources to correctional facilities with lower literacy rates and fewer educational opportunities, with the aim of achieving equitable access to education and rehabilitation services across all prisons.

#### D. Contributions to Knowledge

- **Gendered Perspectives on Literacy in Prisons:** This study contributes to new knowledge by highlighting significant gender disparities in literacy levels among inmates within the prison context. It emphasizes the need for gender-specific interventions to address these disparities and offers insights into the unique challenges faced by female inmates.
- **Interconnectedness of Literacy and Vocational Training:** The study underscores the interdependence of formal education and vocational training within the rehabilitation process. It reveals how inmates' literacy levels influence their participation in vocational training programs and the importance of enhancing literacy as a precursor to successful rehabilitation.
- **Prison-Specific Factors in Rehabilitation:** The research explores variations in literacy levels and access to education across different prisons, shedding light on prison-specific factors that affect inmates' rehabilitation. This knowledge highlights the importance of tailoring policies and interventions to address the unique needs of each prison setting.
- **Gender-Responsive Rehabilitation:** The study advocates for gender-responsive rehabilitation strategies within correctional facilities. It underscores the role of gender-sensitive education programs in empowering female inmates and calls for policies that prioritize female literacy enhancement and vocational training to promote equitable access to rehabilitation opportunities.

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