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## Perceived Effect of Information on Reformation of Prisoners in Ogun State, Nigeria

### EFFET PERÇU DE L'INFORMATION POUR LA RÉFORMATION DES DÉTENUS DANS L'ÉTAT D'OGUN, AU NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** The paper principally focused on perception of prisoners and prison officials on the effect of information on the reformation of prisoners. Using the descriptive and quantitative approach, i.e. questionnaires and visits to the prison yards, the paper established that prisoners do need information for survival while serving sentence but more importantly as a tool for rehabilitation and reformation in preparation for life after prison. Majority of the prisoners surveyed 96 % believe that information is an important tool for reformation. Though it was established that Library is a good source of information to prisoners as stated in international (UN ECOSOC Article 40, 1977) and government policies, the facility was lacking in the two prisons surveyed due to lack of adequate funding and policy of information restriction. Prison managers had to rely on non-governmental organizations (mostly religious bodies) for the provision of reading materials. In order to make information available to prisoners, recommendations ranging from adequate funding, need for professional associations' intervention like their counterparts in developed countries to the need for public libraries in Nigeria to focus on special groups like prisoners in their information provision activities were made.

**Key words:** Perception; Information; Reformation; Prisoners; Ogun State; Nigeria

**Résumé:** Le document se concentre essentiellement sur la perception des détenus et du personnel pénitentiaire de l'effet de l'information sur la réforme des prisonniers. En utilisant l'approche descriptive et quantitative, c'est-à-dire des questionnaires et des visites sur les lieux, l'article constate que les prisonniers ont besoin des informations pour la survie en purgeant une peine, mais surtout pour la réhabilitation et la réformation en préparation de la vie après la prison. La majorité des détenus enquêtés, soit 96% estiment que l'information est un outil important pour la réformation. Bien qu'il ait été constaté que la bibliothèque est une bonne source d'information pour les prisonniers comme indiqué dans les politiques internationales (ONU ECOSOC article 40, 1977) et gouvernementales, il manque des installations dans les cinq prisons enquêtés en raison d'un défaut de financement adéquat et d'une politique de restriction des informations. Les directeurs de prison ont dû compter sur les organisations non gouvernementales (surtout des organismes religieux) pour la provision de matériels de lecture. Afin de rendre l'information accessible aux détenus, des recommandations allant d'un financement adéquat, de la nécessité d'une intervention des associations professionnelles comme leurs homologues ont dans les pays développés, à la nécessité pour les bibliothèques publiques au Nigeria de se concentrer sur des groupes particuliers comme des prisonniers dans leurs activités d'offrir des informations ont été faites.

**Mots clés:** perception; information; réforme; prisonniers; Etat d'Ogun; Nigeria

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The general philosophy about prisons is that it is not only a place to restrict those that went against societal norms but a place where offenders are reformed so that they become better citizens. A good reformation programme will therefore reduce the rate at which previous offenders will return to the prison yards and more importantly prepare them to face life after sentence. Reichert (2010) observed that the majority of prisoners at Illinois prisoners are uneducated and unskilled. It is not as if the educated do not commit crimes, crime commission is however common with the non-educated ones. In order to reform convicts there is therefore the need to re orientate them via education, formal or informal. One of the informal ways is through the provision of information. According to Omoni and Ijeh (2009), Ayu “asserts that prison must be a centre for information and not punishment”. According to an officer in one of the prisons surveyed, prisoners need two types of information, information for settling down at the commencement of incarceration and information that will transform and prepare them for life after time i.e. after completing sentence. This paper will focus on prisoners perception of information as reformation tool and also assess adequacy of information for prisoners reformation.

According to Enuke (1997: 1), seventy percent of the 70,000 inmates of Nigerian Prisons were functionally illiterates “the educational deficits of prison population appeared to be even greater than those of the general population”. As a colony of illiterates, it could be concluded that lack of education or adequate information on the best practices accounts for their being incarcerated.

Therefore, it becomes imperative to study the reformation processes of prisoners viz-a-viz availability of information as part of required tools for successful reformation.

While it could be ascertained that Womboh (1991), Omagbemi and Odunewu (2008) had surveyed Library facilities viz-a-viz Nigerian Prisons focus has not been given to the aspect of information and reformation of Prisoners in Nigeria. This paper, using prisoners in Ogun-State as a focus will explore the place of information as part of reformation tools of prisoners in Nigeria and also explore prisoners perception of its effectiveness.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Advocation for prison reforms dated as far back as 1890s when Davitt (1994) called for criminal and Prison reform. Prior to that time the treatment of offenders was not humane enough, there was discrimination in punishment meted out to offenders. Punishment then was a function of origin or status of offenders in society, while the well-to-do offenders could be banished or have properties seized. On the other hand, the full weight of the law would be brought down on the not so well to do. The situation was not so different in the United States of America where the purpose of imprisonment focuses on Retribution, Incapacitation and Deterrence and Rehabilitation (Prison & Jail 2000). Like Europe the rate of recidivism was high. According to Lin (2000: 3) in 1995 “19% of all parole with suspended sentences returned to jails in America before parole was completed for a new crime”. Similarly, Lin referring to Beck and Shippey further noted a 1989 study of recidivism which showed that 40% of released Prisoners were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor by the end of first year and 62.5% percent were rearrested within 3 years. Rehabilitation was not effective because there were some noted deficiencies in criminals and believe that the treatment of the deficiencies noted can be properly addressed. Rehabilitation initially focused on vocational training but the problem was not solved due to some hindrances within the prisons, some of which are over crowding, lack of professionally trained personnel to teach and train inmates.

Davitt (1894) then suggested that reformation of prisoners need be taken serious that “reformation should combine industrialism – work not debasing but useful and productive labour.

In Prison and Jail (2000) it was recommended that Prisons authorities should come up with “programmes that target offenders needs... and focus on cognitive and social skill of inmates to reduce recidivism” while skills can be addressed through vocation training cognitive and intuitive and cannot be addressed unless there is information on the needs of the inmates. In order to explore opportunities around them the inmates also need information when entering the Prison and at the time of release.

According to Fisher etal (2005) “Information is critical to the definition of “mastery of life” because it aims to resolve issues of problem solving between ‘how things are at the moment’ and ‘how they should be’”. Odusanya and Amusa (2003: 50) quoted Hanson (1978) that “information is normally for use rather than for interest. It is sought by their final users for particular purpose and circumstances. It is of maximum potential use to person who wants it when it meets his need not only in terms of general subject”. Harpey (1991) also believes that “individual and group need adequate information to realize the task of society”. Just as people outside prison yards need information, prisoners also need to know about their family, what life is outside the prison, opportunities that await them on discharge. To survive on daily basis information is required either for domestic or professional use, Omoni and Ijeh (2003) noted that what prisoners in Nigeria lack is adequate information and qualitative education to stem the tide of recidivism. Realising the importance of information, the United Nation’s Rule 39 states that “Prisoners shall be kept informed regularly of the more important

items of news by the reading of newspapers, periodicals or special institution publications, by hearing wireless transmissions, by lectures, or by any similar means as authorized by the administration” (Ehonwa, 1993).

According to Alexander (2008) “Prison authorities need to be proactive by looking for information that could help offenders and he suggested liaison with public libraries. In Alexander’s experiment, he gave lectures on employment opportunities, how to prepare for interview, information on basic changes in town in order to prepare convicts for life after prison.

According to Shirley (2003) for offenders at the early stage of incarceration, reading was confined to the “Bibles and similar religious material aimed at inculcating morality” under the guardian of Prison Chaplain. This was because of the religious believed that criminals are sinners and need to be delivered. But with intervention of professional associations standards were set for Prison Libraries in the United States. In 1977 however, the *Bounds vs. Smith* case mandated that law books be made available in Prison. Although interpreted in variety ways from state to state it marks the penetration of reading materials into Prison Yards. And various public libraries seize the opportunity to make reading materials available to Prisoners. In fact, the impact of reading on Prisoners reformation has also been identified by Davit (1894) when he suggested that more useful books be allowed and more school masters provided with more lecture albeit Sunday School. The United Nations (Economic and Social Council) in *Treatment of offenders* (1977) Article 40 states that “every institution shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners encouraged to make use of them”.

Reading has also been used as alternative treatment for deviants especially among youths and ex-soldiers. Cronje (1993), advocated the use of bibliotherapy in the treatment of issues bothering on character remolding. According to Cronje, “it has positive effect upon personality; helps persons solve personal problems and concerns; expands potential for growth and development and provides instruction, knowledge, understanding and inspiration. He further sighted Monroe, who “views bibliotherapy as part of the continuum of library services. Stanley (2006) defines bibliotherapy as “therapeutic use of books in the treatment of illness or personal problems”. According to Campbell (2010), “Mark Knudsen (2000), an inmate, describes how books and the worlds they represent had been a lifeline in his prison existence. “I do not think I would have been able to handle stressful situations if the library was not readily accessible to me,” .... “It allows me to escape the on-going stress and monotony of being unable to see the outside world firsthand.”

Other sources of information and means of reformation of Prisoners include counseling, vocational training; magazines, and electronic media, however, restriction is applied when necessary.

In spite of the importance of information to prisoners (either for settling down or life after term), and article of Human Rights Charter of United Nations, information restriction is a feature of correctional institutions the world-over.

*Bound vs Smith* case of 1977 guarantees legal information to prisoners in the United States. The judgment was implemented multifariously by federating states. The restriction of information encourages inmates in some cases to exploit fellow inmates (Campbell 2010). Furthermore despite the fact that Public Libraries endeavour to provide reading materials to prisoners, the services is bedeviled with lack of good time for use of the services of the library and lack of reading materials in some cases. There is also restriction on access to internet, information that required net search has to be passed through the prison officials, who will in turn forward it to the Librarian.

Corollary to this is reading time which is restricted to a few hours when the librarian comes on visitation as many of the prison libraries do not have permanent librarian, they rely on mobile library provision like the partnership between Maryland Correctional Education Libraries (MCEL) and Enoch Pratt Public Library (EPPL). In the arrangement MCEL had an agreement with EPPL to extend their children reading programme to prisoners. MCEL also invite Public Librarians to do book discussions with Prison Librarians (Shirley 2006)

Funding of information provision for prisoners has been an issue globally. According to Omoni and ijeh (2009), Ostreicher claimed that rehabilitation of prisoners is not a popular cause with politicians as “New York State spent only six percent of its correctional budget on Education in 2000”. If in a developed world like United States of America, a paltry six percent was spent, it might be of interest to also examine the place of prison libraries in public spending within the context of information provision for prisoners’ reformation in Nigerian as well.

Having discussed the origin of Prison, rehabilitation and reformation, the importance of information and having mentioned possible sources of information for Prisoners, the next stage is to examine effect of information on prisoners reformation using prisons and prisoners in Ogun State as a focus.

### **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this paper two research questions are to be examined. These are:

- (1) Is information valuable to reformation of prisoners? and

(2) Is information required for reformation available in the Prisons studied?

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

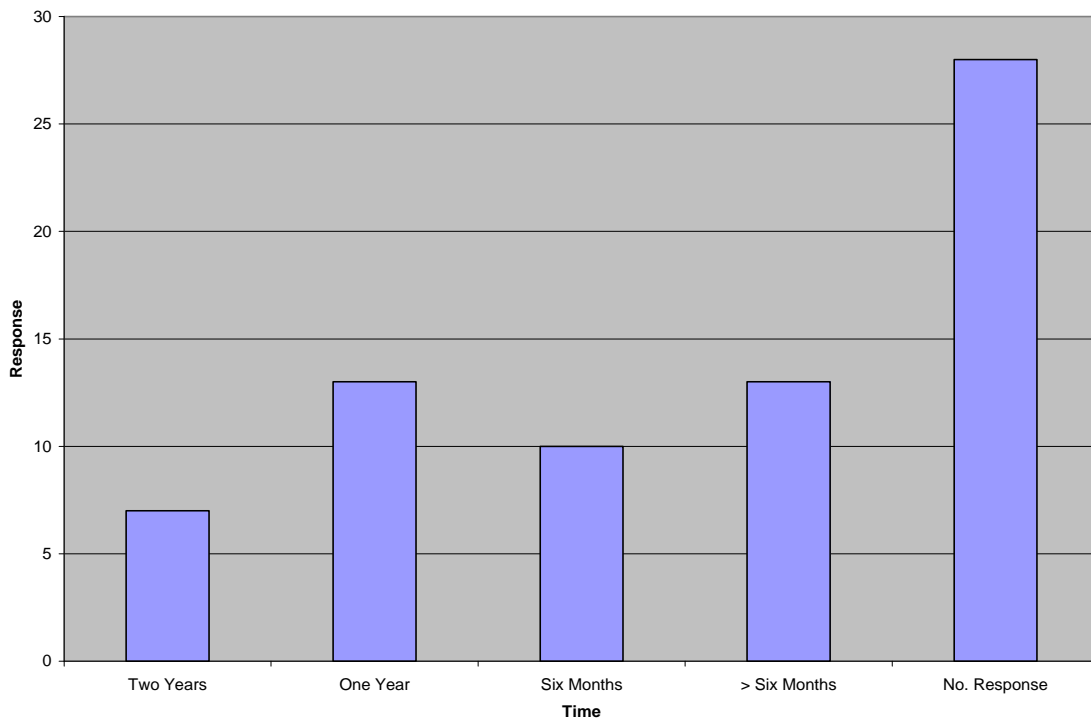
In order to ascertain issues raised in the literature review in the context of Nigeria, qualitative and descriptive methodologies were adopted and they involve prison visits and administration of questionnaires.

Two sets of questionnaires were designed; one is for the head of each prisons surveyed and the second one for soliciting the view of prisoners. There were nine questions for heads of prisons targeted at identifying official policies and implementation as they affect information provision for prisoners. The questionnaire for prisoners, on the other hand, contain twenty questions aimed at ascertaining prisoners' view of information as rehabilitation tool, type of information they viewed as necessary for reformation and their assessment of available information resources within the prison yards surveyed. Possible options were proposed to some of the questions and respondents in some cases choose more than one option where necessary.

In all, 85 questionnaires were randomly administered on the inmates – 50 at Abeokuta Prison and 35 at Ijebu-Ode Prison Yard. During the visit to Abeokuta, it was discovered that Yewa Central College of Education was running a National Certificate of Education, Junior Secondary School, Senior Secondary School as well as Adult Education programmes for inmates. The inmates on the programmes were focused on because it is assumed that they are already seeking information, while at Ijebu-Ode thirty-five convicts were targeted. All the questionnaires were returned, however, fourteen questionnaires representing 17% were dropped. Some were rejected due to obvious duplication, while some appeared non-challantly responded to, thus 71 questionnaires representing 83 percent of were analysed.

#### 5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Four options ranging from less than six months to two years were suggested. The question was to test Prisoners readiness for life after Prison. It is assumed that a Prisoner whose release time is approaching should show traces of what he or she is likely to be. 43 (75%) of the Prisoners hope to be discharged within six months and two years proposed in the questionnaire. The 28 (25%) Prisoners that did not respond are condemned convicts i.e. those condemned to death or lifers.



**Figure 1: Expected Time of Discharge**

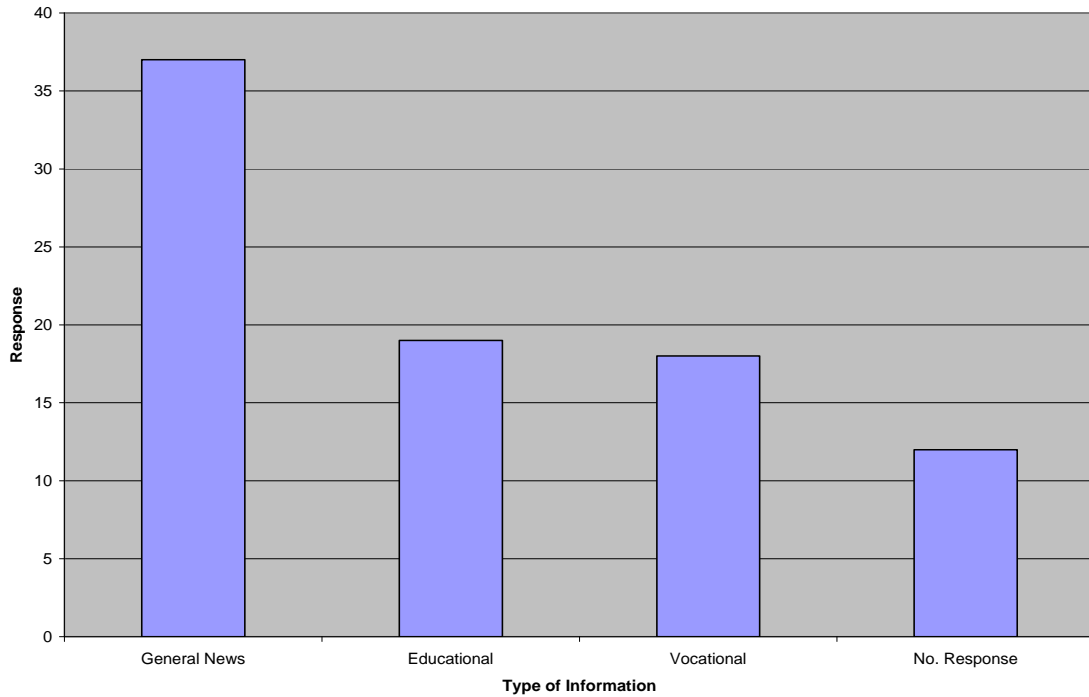


Figure 2: Type of Information Sought By Prisoners

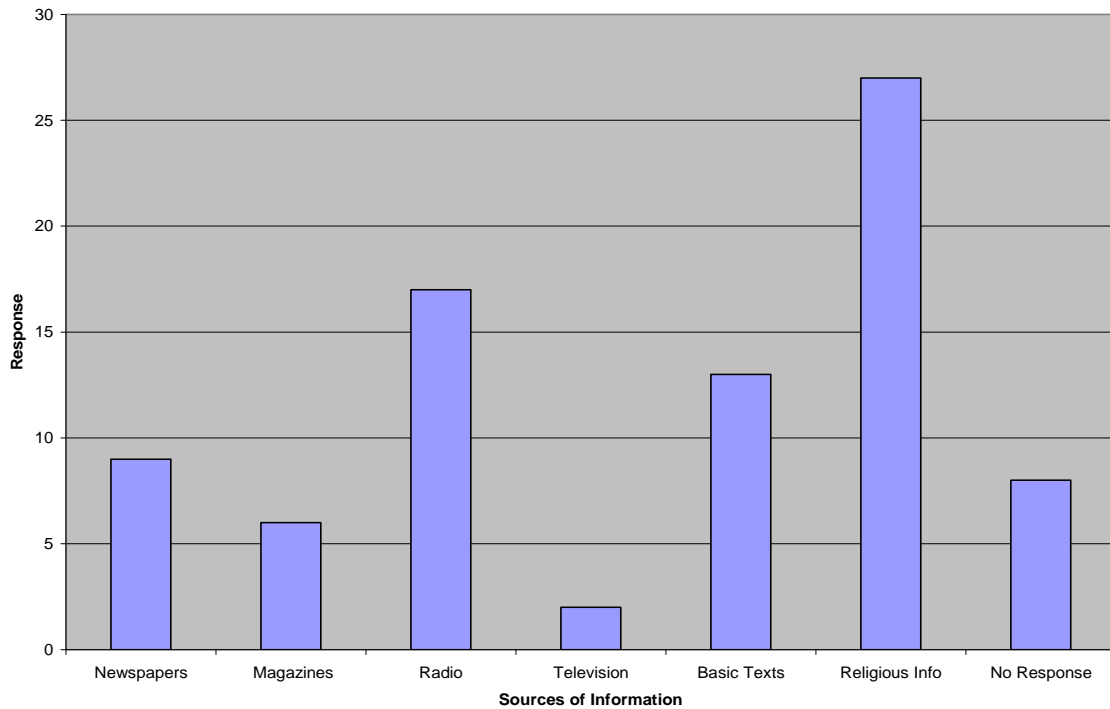
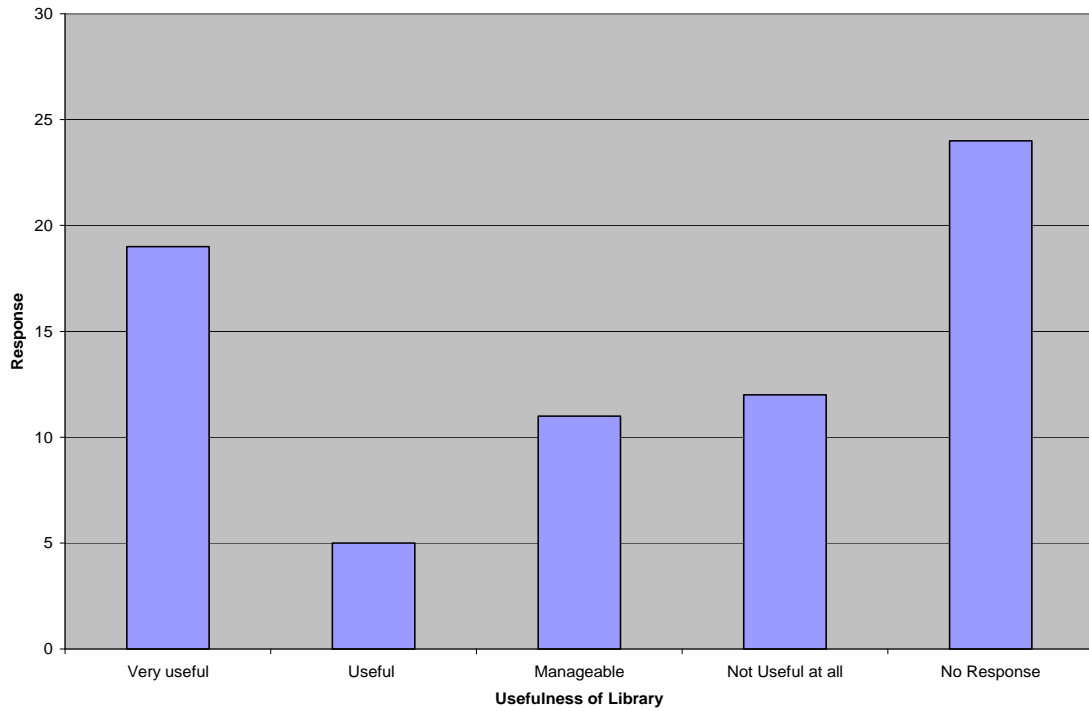


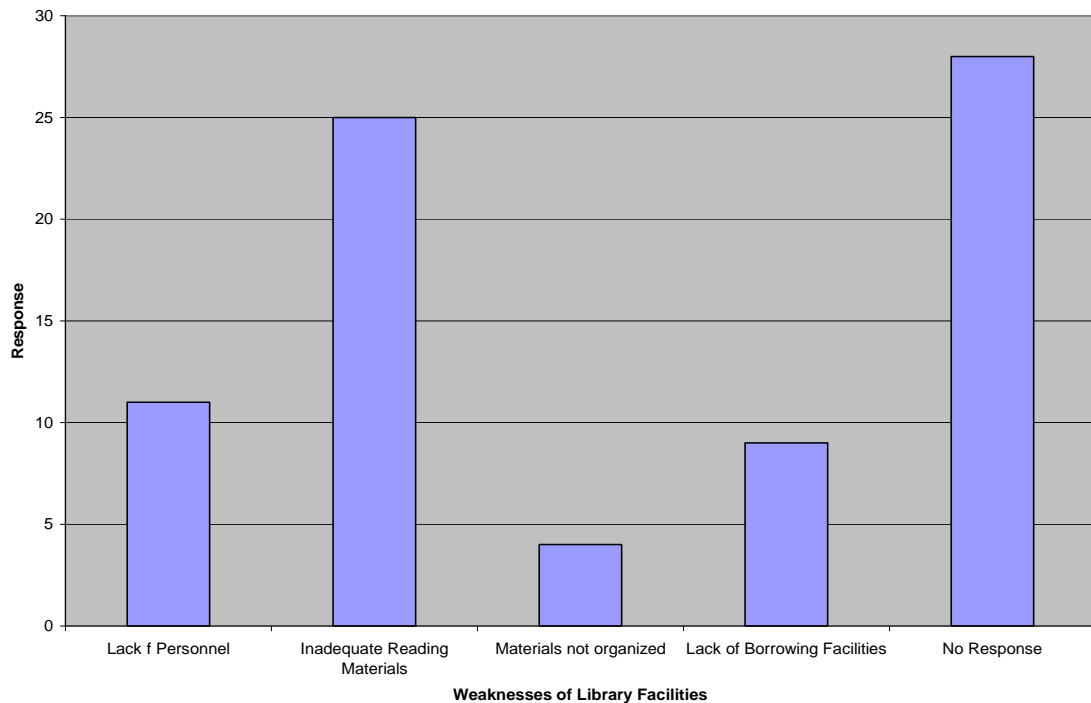
Figure 3: Sources of Information of Prisoners

37 Prisoners or 52% sought general news, while educational and vocational information followed with 19 or 27% and 18 or 25% respectively. However, the combination of the two equaled the number for General News. A chat with a Prisoner revealed that they are eager to know what is going on outside because it would prepare them for life after Prison thus confirming Knudsen's eagerness to know what is going outside the prison walls. It is therefore not surprising that the Danville Project (Alexander 2008) in which Danville Public Library spearheaded provision of information to Ex-Offenders was a favorite. However, there is a restriction to the information made available in this wise because of

security implication, some information could trigger off demonstration by prisoners which in turn could lead to jail breaks. The security issue was raised by the custodians of Prison Yards visited. Prisoners are not allowed to have access to electronic devices like radio, television, internet, mobile phone among others like their American counterparts.



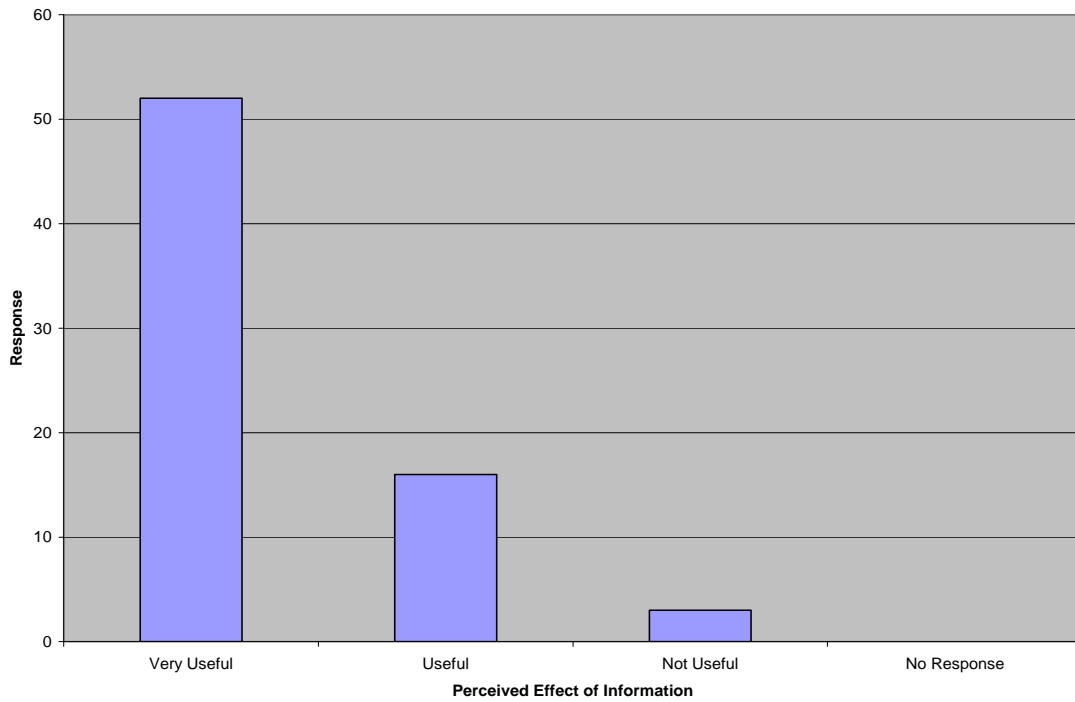
**Figure 4: Usefulness of Library to Prisoners**



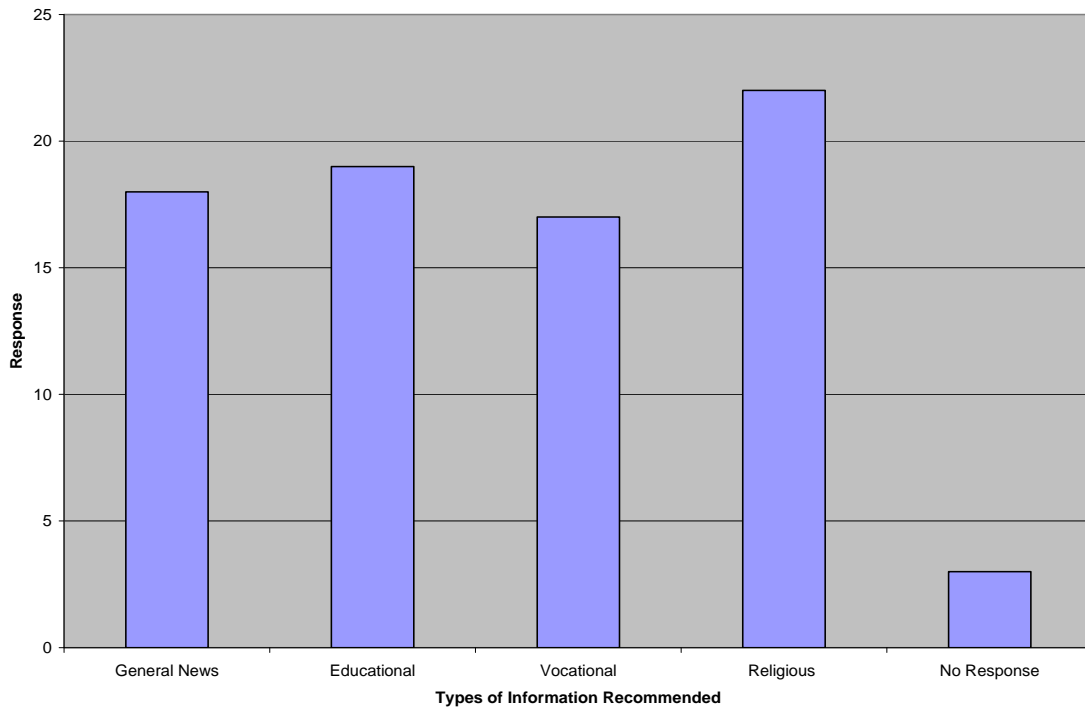
**Figure 5: Weaknesses of Library Facilities**

Prisoners source for information mostly in the area of religion with 27 or 38% responses; Radio 17 or 24% responses, Basic texts 13 or 18%, Newspapers 9 or 13%, Magazines 6 or 8% and Television 2 or 3% in that order. It could be

concluded that Prisoners believe they could get information from sources identified. As mentioned earlier, electronics are not available in Nigerian Prison Yards, hence it cannot be a source of information among Prisoners. According to Shirley (2010) inmates in America also have no access to the internet. Queries that require use of internet are usually passed to prison librarians through warders and result routed at a later date.



**Figure 6: Perceived Effect of Information to Reformation of Prisoners**



**Figure 7: Type of Information Recommended for Reformation of Prisoners**

Only 19 i.e. 27% found the Library very useful and 5 (7%) Prisoners opted for useful, whereas 11 i.e. 15% and 12 i.e. 17% found the Libraries manageable and not useful at all respectively. 24 (33%) Prisoners did not even bother to respond. In summary, 24 respondents or 34% consider the libraries useful while 47 or 65% consider the libraries not useful. A respondent retorted "Our own here is like a clinic without drugs". Yet one visits the Library "to keep mental & intellectual ability and to make positive impact"

Majority of the prisoners i.e. 96% perceive information as a necessary commodity for reformation. 52 or 73% and 16 or 23% respondents consider information very useful and useful respectively. While only 3 or 4% regard information as not being useful. Surprisingly this is the only question that did not record apathy on the part of Prisoners of Abeokuta and Ijebu-ode Prisons.

While 22 (i.e. 31%) Prisoners identify religious information as the leading information required, 19 (27%), 18 (25%), 17 (24%) for Educational, General news and Vocational were also recommended in that order respectively.

Having agreed that information is a veritable tool for reformation, prisoners identified religious information as the most important information for reformation. Can it be concluded therefore, that Prisoners has recognized their moral weaknesses? On the other hand it could be attributed to the impact of activities of various religious bodies on the welfare of Prisoners. In both Prisons studied both Officers and Prisoners commended the support of religious bodies and Non-Governmental Organisations, Justice Development and Peace Commission finances supply of Newspapers to the Prisons and religious bodies are also involved in counseling, vocational training and supply of tools for training and rehabilitation of Prisoners after completion of term.

When Figure II is taken with Figure VII, it would be seen that the issue of education and vocational training need to be given adequate attention in rehabilitation and reformation of Prisoners in Nigeria.

### **Information Provision for Reformation of Prisoners: Official Perspective**

There is no noticeable difference in the provision of information and reformation programmes for Prisoners at the two Prisons studied. As earlier mentioned, the two Prisons restrict information to Prisoners. Information that is readily available is religious one provided by religious organization in Abeokuta Prison however, Yewa Central College of Education is running a Primary, Secondary and National Certificate of Education for inmates. The programme is solely sponsored by the College.

Funding of informational and educational programmes in the two Prisons is not encouraging. In fact it does not exist as the question on financing of education and information for the past three years returned nil and partially. A look at the Nigerian Prisons Services budget for 2010 revealed that a little over ten million naira was allocated for Prison Libraries (Ministry of Interior Website) and there are 147 Prisons and 83 Settlement Camps to take care of.

The two Prisons have vocational facilities to support the rehabilitation Prisoners. Prisoners were given Sewing Machines and Carpentry tools on completion of their terms. The two Prisons have success story of Prisoners that they could vouch for in the past and among current inmates. At the Ijebu-ode Prison an inmate wrote and passed Secondary School Certificate while in incarceration. The inmates will complete his term in not too a distant future and the officers believe that with the support of his family he will surely turn a new leaf.

Adeniyi, a Lifer at Kirikiri Maximum attributed his being in prison to lack of awareness, having adjusted to his new environment he believes that "The prison is not supposed to kill your spirit. Rather it is supposed to reform you. If I had been aware of the consequences of my behavior, I would never have gone in to crime" (Balogun 2010)

Adeniyi, started his term in Abeokuta Prison and was transferred to Lagos where he could get facilities to support his yearning for education. He is at the moment a head teacher of Kirikiri maximum Prison School for Inmates, a registered student of National Open University, where he is undergoing a Diploma Programme in Finance and at the same time running a Correspondence Degree programme in Theology with an American University.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Research Questions 1 and 2 were confirmed that Prisoners in Nigeria represented by the sample in Ogun State do perceive information as a necessity for effect reformation as shown in Figure VI with 96% (Very useful 73% and useful 23%) respondents and secondly that information required for reformation is lacking in the prisons studied as mere 24% (19% and 5%) consider the library as very useful and useful respectively. (Figure IV).

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the fact that Nigerian Prisons have a large number of young inmates, who are expected to join the labour market on the completion of their terms and consequently need to be prepared for the attendant challenges and furthermore in



view of the foregoing that information facilities like libraries are lacking in the prisons studied, it is recommended as follows:

- i. Information provision for inmates need be given urgent attention. This will be in line with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UN ECOSOC 1977), which says that books, education and information facilities should be made available for Prisoners.
- ii. Funding of Library services need to be looked into as mere N10,807,740 (Ten Million, Eight Hundred and Seven Thousand, Seven Hundred and Forty Naira) was budgeted for 147 prisons, in Nigeria On the average this about N73,552 (Seventy-three thousand, five hundred and fifty-two naira) per prison. If released, this definitely cannot achieve much.
- iii. The Nigerian Library Association need to give attention to the provision of information for the disadvantaged group. A guideline is recommended to be prepared and governments i.e. States and Federal be sensitized accordingly.
- iv. Public Libraries in Nigeria need to take up the challenge of information provision for the disadvantage group as done by Maryland Correctional educational Libraries (Shirley 2006) and Danville Public Library (Alexander 2008).

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